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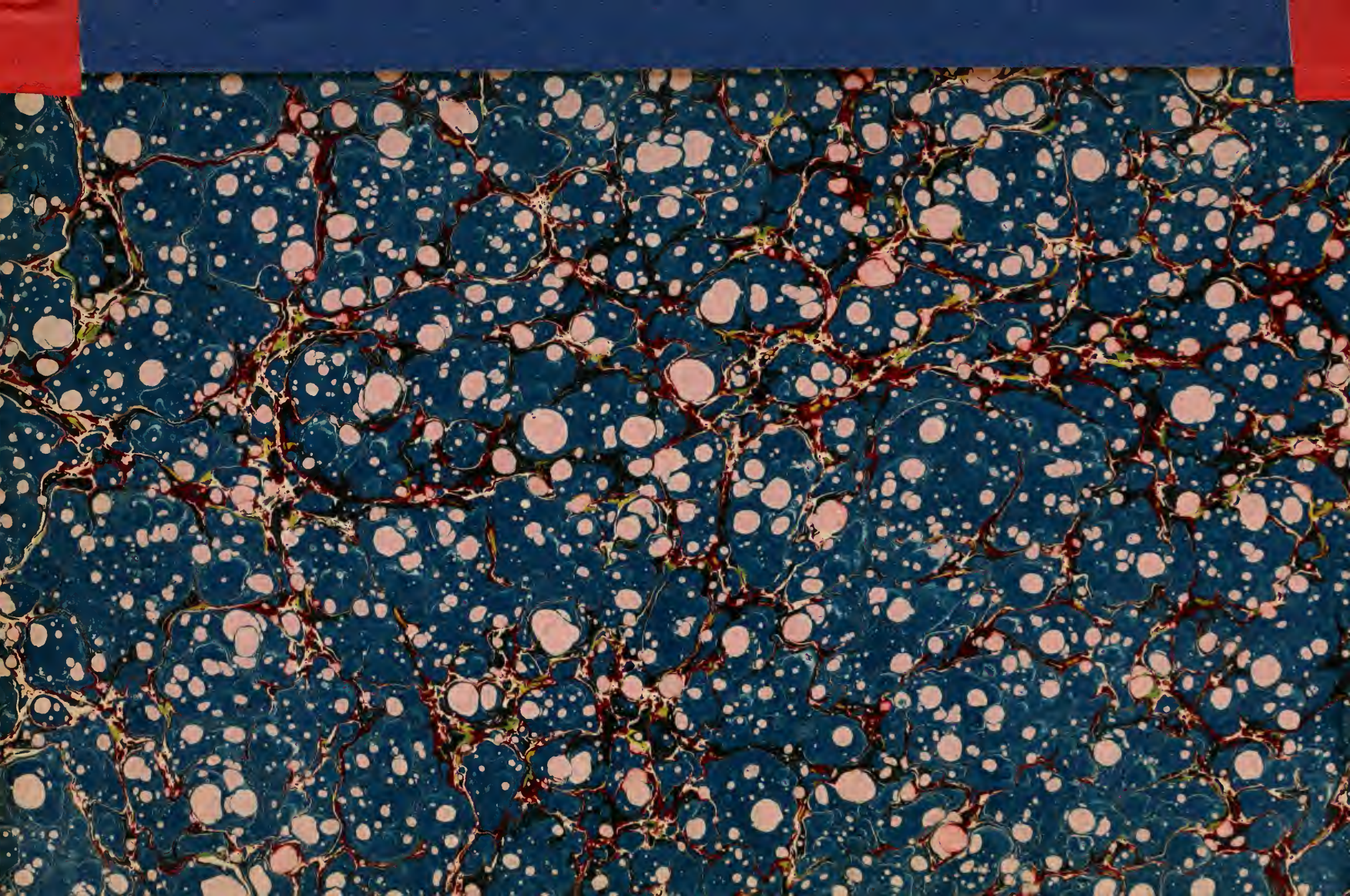

WILLIAM SHAKSPERE:

A BIOGRAPHY.

BY CHARLES KNIGHT

REVISED AND AUGMENTED.

"All that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakspere is—that he was born at Stratford upon-Avon—married and had children there—went to Loudon, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried."—STEEVENS.

"Along with that tomb-stone information, perhaps even without much of it, we could have liked to gain some answer, in one way or other, to this wide question: What and how was ENGLISH LIFE in *Shakspere's* time; wherein has ours grown to differ therefrom? in other words: What things have we to forget, what to fancy and remember, before we, from such distance, can put ourselves in *Shakspere's* place; and so, in the full sense of the term, understand him, his sayings, and his doings?"—CARLYLE.

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PREFACE.

THIS is a new edition, with large alterations and additional matter, grounded upon more recent information, of a volume published in 1843. That book has been long out of print: and it is a gratification to me to reproduce it thoroughly revised.

The two mottoes in the title-page express the principle upon which this Biography has been written. That from Steevens shows, with a self-evident exaggeration of its author, how scanty are the materials for a Life of Shakspere properly so called. Indeed, every Life of him must, to a certain extent, be conjectural; and all the Lives that have been written are in great part conjectural. My 'Biography' is only so far more conjectural than any other, as regards the form which it assumes; by which it has been endeavoured to associate Shakspere with the circumstances around him, in a manner which may fix them in the mind of the reader by exciting his interest.

I fully agree with Mr. Hunter, with regard to the want of information on the life of Shakspere, that he is, in this respect, in the state in which most of his contemporary poets are—Spenser for instance—but with this difference, that we do know more concerning Shakspere than we know of most of his contemporaries of the same class. Admitting this sound reasoning, I still believe that the attempt which I ventured to make, for the first time in English Literature, to write a Biography which, in the absence of Diaries and Letters, should surround the known facts with the local and temporary circumstances, and with the social relations amidst which one of so defined a position must have moved, was not a freak of fancy, but an approximation to the truth, which could not have been reached by a mere documentary narrative.

What I proposed thus to do is shown in the second motto, from Mr. Carlyle's admirable article on Dr. Johnson, I having ventured to substitute the name of "Shakspere" for that of "Johnson." I might have accomplished the same end by writing a short notice of Shakspere, accompanied by a History of Manners and Customs, a History of the Stage, &c. &c. The form I have adopted may appear fanciful, but the narrative essentially rests upon facts. I venture, therefore, to think that I have made the course of Shakspere clear and consistent, without any extravagant theories, and with some successful resistance to long received prejudices.

Since the publication of the original edition of this volume in 1843, there have been considerable accessions to the documentary materials for the Life of Shakspere. Many of these are curious and valuable; others are memorials of that diligent antiquarianism, whose results are not always proportionate to its labour. I have availed myself of any real information which has been brought to light during the last two-and-twenty years, and I have in every case ascribed the merit of any discovery to its proper author.

CHARLES KNIGHT.

1865.

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From Original Drawings by W. HARVEY; the Fac-similes and Autographs by F. W. FAIRHOLT.

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BOOK I

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

ANCESTRY.

On the 22nd of August, 1485, there was a battle fought for the crown of England, a short battle ending in a decisive victory. In that field a crowned king, "manfully fighting in the middle of his enemies, was slain and brought to his death;" and a politic adventurer put on the crown, which the immediate descendants of his house wore for nearly a century and a quarter. The battle-field was Bosworth. "When the earl had thus obtained victory and slain his mortal enemy, he kneeled down and rendered to Almighty God his hearty thanks, with devout and godly orisons. . . . Which prayer finished, he, replenished with incomparable gladness, ascended up to the top of a little mountain, where he not only praised and lauded his valiant soldiers, but also gave unto them his hearty thanks, with promise of condign recompense for their fidelity and valiant facts."* Two months afterwards the Earl of Richmond was

* Hall's Chronicle.

more solemnly crowned and anointed at Westminster by the name of King Henry VII.; and "after this," continues the chronicler, "he began to remember his especial friends and fautors, of whom some he advanced to honour and dignity, and some he enriched with possessions and goods, every man according to his desert and merit."* Was there in that victorious army of the Earl of Richmond,—which Richard denounced as a "company of traitors, thieves, outlaws, and runagates,"—an Englishman bearing the name of Chacksper, or Shakespeyre, or Schakespere, or Schakespeire, or Schakspere, or Shakespere, or Shakspere,†—a martial name, however spelt? "Breakespear, Shakespear, and the like, have been surnames imposed upon the first bearers of them for valour and feats of arms."‡ Of the warlike achievements of this Shakspere there is no record: his name or his deeds would have no interest for us unless there had been born, eighty years after this battle-day, a direct descendant from him:—

> "Whose muse, full of high thought's invention,
> Doth like himself *heroically sound*;" §—

a Shakspere, of whom it was also said—

> "He seems *to shake a lance*
> As brandish'd at the eyes of ignorance." ‖

Certainly there was a Shakspere, the paternal ancestor of William Shakspere, who, if he stood not nigh the little mountain when the Earl of Richmond promised condign recompense to his valiant soldiers, was amongst those especial friends and fautors whom Henry VII. enriched with possessions and goods. A public document bearing the date of 1596 affirms of John Shakspere of Stratford-upon Avon, the father of William Shakspere, that his "parent and late antecessors were, for their *valiant* and faithful services, advanced and rewarded of the most prudent prince King Henry VII. of famous memory;" and it adds, "sithence which time they have continued at those parts [Warwickshire] in good reputation and credit." Another document of a similar character, bearing the date of 1599, also affirms upon "creditable report," of "John Shakspere, now of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gentleman," that his "parent and great-grandfather, late antecessor, for his faithful and approved service to the late most prudent prince King Henry VII. of famous memory, was advanced and rewarded with lands and tenements, given to him in those parts of Warwickshire, where they have continued by some descents in good reputation and credit." Such are the recitals of two several grants of arms to John Shakspere, confirming a previous grant made to him in 1569; and let it not be said that these statements were the rhodomontades of heraldry,—honours bestowed, for mere mercenary considerations, upon any pretenders to gentle blood. There was strict inquiry if they were unworthily bestowed. Two centuries and a half ago

* Hall's Chronicle.

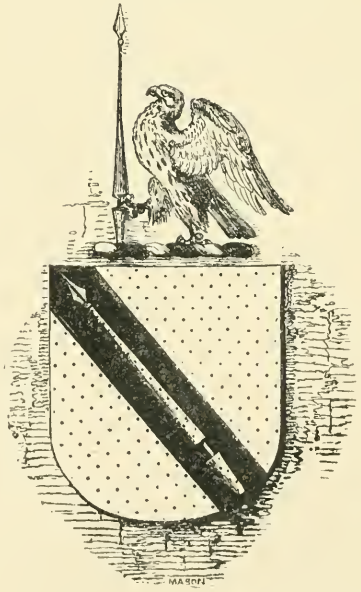
† A list of the brethren and sisters of the Guild of Knowle, near Rowington, in Warwickshire, exhibits a great number of the name of Shakspere in that fraternity, from about 1460 to 1527; and the names are spelt with the diversity here given, *Shakspere* being the latest.

‡ Verstegan's 'Restitution,' &c. § Spenser. ‖ Ben Jonson.

such honours were of grave importance; and there is a solemnity in the tone of these very documents which, however it may provoke a smile from what we call philosophy, was connected with high and generous principles: "Know ye that in all nations and kingdoms the record and remembrance of the valiant facts and virtuous dispositions of worthy men have been made known and divulged by certain shields of arms and tokens of chivalry." In those parts of Warwickshire, then, lived and died, we may assume, the faithful and approved servant of the "unknown Welshman," as Richard called him, who won for himself the more equivocal name of "the most prudent prince." He was probably advanced in years when Henry ascended the throne; for in the first year of Queen Elizabeth, 1558, his great-grandson, John Shakspere, was a burgess of the corporation of Stratford, and was in all probability born about 1530. John Shakspere was of the third generation succeeding the adherent of Henry VII. The family had continued in those parts, "by some descents;" but how they were occupied in the business of life, what was their station in society, how they branched out into other lines of Shaksperes, we have no distinct record. They were probably cultivators of the soil, unambitious small proprietors. The name may be traced by legal documents in many parishes of Warwickshire; but we learn from a deed of trust, executed in 1550 by Robert Arden, the maternal grandfather of William Shakspere, that Richard Shakspere was the occupier of land in Snitterfield, the property of Robert Arden. At this parish of Snitterfield lived a Henry Shakspere, who, as we learn from a declaration in the Court of Record at Stratford, was the brother of John Shakspere. It is conjectured, and very reasonably, that Richard Shakspere, of Snitterfield, was the paternal grandfather of William Shakspere. Snitterfield is only three miles distant from Stratford.

A painter of manners, who comes near to the times of John Shakspere, has described the probable condition of his immediate ancestors: "Yeomen are those which by our law are called *legales homines*, free men born English. . . . The truth is, that the word is derived from the Saxon term zeoman, or geoman, which signifieth (as I have read) a settled or staid man. . . . This sort of people have a certain preeminence and more estimation than labourers and the common sort of artificers, and these commonly live wealthily, keep good houses, and travel to get riches. They are also for the most part farmers to gentlemen, or at the leastwise artificers; and with grazing, frequenting of markets, and keeping of servants (not idle servants as the gentlemen do, but such as get both their own and part of their masters' living), do come to great wealth, insomuch that many of them are able and do buy the lands of unthrifty gentlemen, and often, setting their sons to the schools, to the universities, and to the inns of the court, or otherwise leaving them sufficient lands whereupon they may live without labour, do make them by those means to become gentlemen: these were they that in times past made all France afraid." Plain-speaking Harrison, who wrote this description in the middle of the reign of Elizabeth, tells us how the yeoman and the descendants of the yeoman could be changed into gentlemen; "Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, whoso abideth in the university giving his mind to his book, or professeth physic and the liberal sciences, or beside his service in the room of a

captain in the wars, or good counsel given at home, whereby his commonwealth is benefited, can live without manual labour, and thereto is able and will bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman, he shall for money have a coat and arms bestowed upon him by heralds (who in the charter of the same do of custom pretend antiquity and service, and many gay things), and thereunto being made so good cheap, be called master, which is the title that men give to esquires and gentlemen, and reputed for a gentleman ever after." And so John Shakspere, whilst he was bailiff of Stratford in 1568 or 1569, desired to have "a coat and arms;" and for instruction to the heralds as to the "gay things" they were to say in their charter, of "honour and service," he told them, and he no doubt told them truly, that he was great-grandson to one who had been advanced and rewarded by Henry VII. And so for ever after he was no more goodman Shakspere, or John Shakspere, yeoman, but Master Shakspere; and this short change in his condition was produced by virtue of a grant of arms by Robert Cook, Clarencieux King at Arms; which shield or coat of arms was *confirmed* by William Dethick, Garter, principal King of Arms, in 1596, as follows: "Gould, on a bend sable and a speare of the first, the point steeled, proper; and his crest, or cognizance, a faulcon, his wings displayed, argent, standing on a wrethe of his coullors supporting a speare gould steele as aforesaid, sett uppon a helmet with mantells and tassells."



[Arms of John Shakspere.]

But there were other arms one day to be impaled with the "speare of the first, the poynt steeled, proper." In 1599 John Shakspere again goes to the College of Arms, and, producing his own "ancient coat of arms," says that he has "married the daughter and one of the heirs of Robert Arden, of Wellingcote:" and then the heralds take the "speare of the first," and say—"We have likewise upon on other escutcheon impaled the same with the ancient arms of the said Arden of Wellingcote." They add that John Shakspere, and his children, issue, and posterity, may bear and use the same shield of arms, single or impaled.

The family of Arden was one of the highest antiquity in Warwickshire. Dugdale traces its pedigree uninterruptedly up to the time of Edward the Confessor. Under the head of Curdworth, a parish in the hundred of Hemlingford, he says—"In this place I have made choice to speak historically of that most ancient and worthy family, whose surname was first assumed from their residence in this part of the country, then and yet called Arden, by reason of its woodiness, the old Britons and Gauls using the word in that sense." At the time of the Norman invasion there resided at Warwick, Turchil, "a man of especial note and power" and of "great possessions." In the Domesday Book his father, Alwyne, is styled *vice comes*. Turchil, as well as his father, received favour at the hands of the Conqueror. He retained the possession of vast lands in the shire, and he occupied Warwick Castle as a military governor. He was thence called Turchil de Warwick by the Normans. But Dugdale goes on to say—"He was one of the first here in England that, in imitation of the Normans, assumed a surname, for so it appears that he did, and wrote himself *Turchillus de Eardene*, in the days of King William Rufus." The history of the De Ardens, as collected with wonderful industry by Dugdale, spreads over six centuries. Such records seldom present much variety of incident, however great and wealthy be the family to which they are linked. In this instance a shrievalty or an attainder varies the register of birth and marriage, but generation after generation passes away without leaving any enduring traces of its sojourn on the earth. Fuller has not the name of a single De Arden amongst his "Worthies"—men illustrious for something more than birth or riches, with the exception of those who swell the lists of sheriffs for the county. The pedigree which Dugdale gives of the Arden family brings us no nearer in the direct line to the mother of Shakspere than to Robert Arden, her great-grandfather: he was the third son of Walter Arden, who married Eleanor, the daughter of John Hampden, of Buckinghamshire; and he was brother to Sir John Arden, squire for the body to Henry VII. Malone, with laudable industry, has continued the pedigree in the younger branch. Robert's son, also called Robert, was groom of the chamber to Henry VII. He appears to have been a favourite; for he had a valuable lease granted him by the king of the manor of Yoxsall, in Staffordshire, and was also made keeper of the royal park of Aldercar. His uncle, Sir John Arden, probably showed him the road to these benefits. The squire for the body was a high officer of the ancient court; and the groom of the chamber was an inferior officer, but one who had service and responsibilty. The correspondent offices of modern times, however encumbered with the wearisomeness of etiquette, are relieved from the old duties, which are now intrusted to

hired servants. The squire for the body had to array the king and unarray; no man else was to set hand on the king. The groom of the robes was to present the squire for the body "all the king's stuff, as well his shoon as his other gear;" but the squire for the body was to draw them on. If the sun of majesty was to enlighten the outer world, the squire humbly followed with the cloak; when royalty needed refection, the squire duly presented the potage. But at night it was his duty, and much watchfulness did it require, to preside over all those jealous safeguards that once fenced round a sleeping king from a traitorous subject. In a pallet bed, in the same room with the king, rested the gentleman or lord of the bedchamber; in the ante-room slept the groom of the bedchamber; in the privy chamber adjoining were two gentlemen in waiting; and, lastly, in the presence-chamber reposed the squire for the body under the cloth of estate. Locks and bolts upon every door defended each of these approaches, and the sturdy yeomen mounted guard without, so that the pages, who made their pallets at the last chamber threshold, might sleep in peace.* It is not improbable that the ancestor of John Shakspere might have guarded the door without, whilst Sir John Arden slept upon the *haut pas* within. They had each their relative importance in their own day; but they could little foresee that in the next century their blood would mingle, and that one would descend from them who would make the world agree not utterly to forget their own names, however indifferent that future world might be to the comparative importance of the court servitude of the Arden or the Shakspere. Robert Arden, the groom of the bedchamber to Henry VII., probably left the court upon the death of his master. He married, and he had a son, also Robert, who married Agnes Webbe. Their youngest daughter was Mary, the mother of William Shakspere.†

Mary Arden! The name breathes of poetry. It seems the personification of some Dryad of

"Many a huge-grown wood, and many a shady grove,"

called by that generic name of Arden,—a forest with many towns,

* This information is given in a long extract from a manuscript in the Herald's Office, quoted in Malone's 'Life of Shakspeare.'

† From the connection of these immediate ancestors of Shakspere's mother with the court of Henry VII., Malone has assumed that they were the "antecessors" of John Shakspere declared in the grants of arms to have been advanced and rewarded by the conqueror of Bosworth Field. Because Robert Arden had a lease of the royal manor of Yoxsall, in Staffordshire, Malone also contends that the reward of lands and tenements stated in the grant of arms to have been bestowed upon the ancestor of John Shakspere really means the beneficial lease to Robert Arden. He holds that *popularly* the grandfather of Mary Arden would have been called the grandfather of John Shakspere, and that John Shakspere himself would have so called him. The answer is very direct. The grant of arms recites that the *great*-grandfather of John Shakspere had been advanced and rewarded by Henry VII., and then *goes on to say* that John Shakspere had married the daughter of Robert Arden of Wellingcote: He has an ancient coat-of-arms of his own derived from his ancestor, and the arms of his wife are to be impaled with these his own arms. Can the interpretation of this document then be that Mary Arden's grandfather is the person pointed out as John Shakspere's *great*-grandfather; and that, having an ancient coat-of-arms himself, his ancestry is really that of his wife, whose arms are totally different?

"Whose footsteps yet are found,
In her rough woodlands more than any other ground,
That mighty Arden held even in her height of pride,
Her one hand touching Trent, the other Severn's side."*

That name of Mary Arden sounds as blandly as the verse of this fine old panegyrist of his "native country," when he describes the songs of birds in those solitudes amongst which the house of Arden had for ages been seated :—

"The softer with the shrill (some hid among the leaves,
Some in the taller trees, some in the lower greaves)
Thus sing away the morn, until the mounting sun
Through thick exhaled fogs his golden head hath run,
And through the twisted tops of our close covert creeps
To kiss the gentle shade, this while that sweetly sleeps."†

High as was her descent, wealthy and powerful as were the numerous branches of her family, Mary Arden, we doubt not, led a life of usefulness as well as innocence, within her native forest hamlet. She had three sisters, and they all, with their mother Agnes, survived their father, who died in December, 1556. His will is dated the 24th of November in the same year, and the testator styles himself "Robert Arden, of Wylmcote, in the paryche of Aston Cauntlow."

[Village of Wilmecote.]

The face of the country must have been greatly changed in three centuries. A canal, with lock rising upon lock, now crosses the hill upon which the village

* Drayton. Polyolbion, 13th Song. † Ibid.

stands ; but traffic has not robbed the place of its green pastures and its shady nooks, though nothing is left of the ancient magnificence of the great forest. There is very slight appearance of antiquity about the present village, and certainly not a house in which we can conceive that Robert Arden resided.

It was in the reign of Philip and Mary that Robert Arden died ; and we cannot therefore be sure that the wording of his will is any absolute proof of his religious opinions :—" First, I bequeath my soul to Almighty God and to our blessed Lady Saint Mary, and to all the holy company of heaven, and my body to be buried in the churchyard of Saint John the Baptist in Aston aforesaid." One who had conformed to the changes of religion might even have begun his last testament with this ancient formula ; even as the will of Henry VIII. himself is so worded. (See Rymer's ' Fœdera.') Mary, his youngest daughter, from superiority of mind, or some other cause of her father's confidence, occupies the most prominent position in the will :—" I give and bequeath to my youngest daughter Mary all my land in Wilmecote, called Asbies, and the crop upon the ground, sown and tilled as it is, and six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence of money to be paid over ere my goods be divided." To his daughter Alice he bequeaths the third part of all his goods, moveable and unmoveable, in field and town ; to his wife Agnes, the step-mother of his children, six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence, under the condition that she should allow his daughter Alice to occupy half of a copyhold at Wilmecote, the widow having her "jointure in Snitterfield," near Stratford. The remainder of his goods is divided amongst his other children. Alice and Mary are made the " full executors " to his will. We thus see that the youngest daughter has an undivided estate and a sum of money ; and, from the crop being also bequeathed to her, it is evident that she was considered able to continue the tillage. The estate thus bequeathed to her consisted of about sixty acres of arable and pasture, and a house. It was a small fortune for a descendant of the lord of forty-seven manors in the county of Warwickshire,* but it was enough for happiness. Luxury had scarcely ever come under her paternal roof. The house of Wilmecote would indeed be a well-timbered house, being in a woody country. It would not be a house of splints and clay, such as made the Spaniard in that very reign of Mary say, " These English have their houses made of sticks and dirt, but they fare commonly as well as the king." It was some twenty years after the death of Robert Arden that Harrison described the growth of domestic luxury in England, saying, " There are old men yet dwelling in the village where I remain, which have noted three things to be marvellously altered in England within their sound remembrance." One of these enormities is the multitude of chimneys lately erected, whereas formerly each one made his fire against a reredosse in the hall, where he dined and dressed his meat : the second thing is the great amendment of lodging—the pillows, the beds, the sheets, instead of the straw pallet, the rough mat, the good round log or the sack of chaff under the head : the third thing is the exchange of vessels, as of treen platters

* See an account in Dugdale of the possessions, recited in ' Domesday Book,' of Turchil de Arden.

into pewter, and wooden spoons into silver or tin. He then describes the altered splendour of the substantial farmer: "A fair garnish of pewter on his cupboard, with so much more in odd vessels going about the house; three or four feather-beds; so many coverlids and carpets of tapestry; a silver salt, a bowl for wine, and a dozen of spoons to furnish up the suit." Robert Arden had certainly not a mansion filled with needless articles for use or ornament. In the inventory of his goods taken after his death we find table-boards, forms, cushions, benches, and one cupboard in his hall; there are painted cloths in the hall and in the chamber; seven pair of sheets, five board-cloths, and three towels; there is one feather-bed and two mattresses, with sundry coverlets, and articles called canvasses, three bolsters, and one pillow. The kitchen boasts four pans, four pots, four candlesticks, a basin, a chafing-dish, two cauldrons, a frying-pan, and a gridiron. And yet this is the grandson of a groom of a king's bedchamber, an office filled by the noble and the rich, and who, in the somewhat elevated station of a gentleman of worship, would probably possess as many conveniences and comforts as a rude state of society could command. There was plenty outdoors —oxen, bullocks, kine, weaning calves, swine, bees, poultry, wheat in the barns, barley, oats, hay, peas, wood in the yard, horses, colts, carts, ploughs. Robert Arden had lived through unquiet times, when there was little accumulation, and men thought rather of safety than of indulgence: the days of security were at hand. Then came the luxuries that Harrison looked upon with much astonishment and some little heartburning.

And so in the winter of 1556 was Mary Arden left without the guidance of a father. We learn from a proceeding in Chancery some forty years later that with the land of Asbies there went a messuage. Mary Arden had therefore a roof-tree of her own. Her sister Alice was to occupy another property at Wilmecote with the widow. Mary Arden lived in a peaceful hamlet; but there were some strange things around her,—incomprehensible things to a very young woman. When she went to the church of Aston Cantlow, she now heard the mass sung, and saw the beads bidden; whereas a few years before there was another form of worship within those walls. She learnt, perhaps, of mutual persecutions and intolerance, of neighbour warring against neighbour, of child opposed to father, of wife to husband. She might have beheld these evils. The rich religious houses of her county and vicinity had been suppressed, their property scattered, their chapels and fair chambers desecrated, their very walls demolished. The new power was trying to restore them, but, even if it could have brought back the old riches, the old reverence was passed away. In that solitude she probably mused upon many things with an anxious heart. The wealthier Ardens of Kingsbury and Hampton, of Rotley and Rodburne and Park Hall, were her good cousins; but bad roads and bad times perhaps kept them separate. And so she lived a somewhat lonely life, till a young yeoman of Stratford, whose family had been her father's tenants, came to sit oftener and oftener upon those wooden benches in the old hall—a substantial yeoman, a burgess of the corporation in 1557 or 1558; and then in due season, perhaps in the very year when Romanism was lighting its last fires in England, and a queen was dying with "Calais" written on her heart, Mary

Arden and John Shakspere were, in all likelihood, standing before the altar of the parish church of Aston Cantlow, and the house and lands of Asbies became administered by one who took possession "by the right of the said Mary," who thenceforward abided for half a century in the good town of Stratford. There is no register of the marriage discovered: but the date must have been about a year after the father's death; for "Joan Shakspere, daughter to John Shakspere" was, according to the Stratford register, baptized on the 15th September, 1558.

['Church of Aston Cantlow.']

[Clopton's Bridge.]

CHAPTER II.

STRATFORD.

A PLEASANT place is this quiet town of Stratford—a place of ancient traffic "the name having been originally occasioned from the *ford* or passage over the water upon the great *street* or road leading from Henley in Arden towards London."* England was not always a country of bridges: rivers asserted their own natural rights, and were not bestrid by domineering man. If the people of Henley in Arden would travel towards London, the Avon might invite or oppose their passage at his own good will; and, indeed, the river so often swelled into a rapid and dangerous stream, that the honest folk of the one bank might be content to hold somewhat less intercourse with their neighbours on the other than Englishmen now hold with the antipodes. But the days of improvement were sure to arrive. There were charters for markets, and charters for fairs, obtained from King Richard and King John; and in process of time Stratford rejoiced in a wooden bridge, though without a causey, and exposed to constant damage by flood. And then an alderman of London,—in

* Dugdale.

days when the very rich were not slow to do magnificent things for public benefit, and did less for their own vain pride and luxury,—built a stone bridge over the Avon, which has borne the name of Clopton's Bridge, even from the days of Henry VII. until this day. Ecclesiastical foundations were numerous at Stratford; and such were, in every case, the centres of civilization and prosperity. The parish church was a collegiate one, with a chantry of five priests; and there was an ancient guild and chapel of the Holy Cross, partly a religious and partly a civil institution. A grammar-school was connected with the guild; and the municipal government of the town was settled in a corporation by charter of Edward VI., and the grammar-school especially maintained. Here then was a liberal accumulation, such as belongs only to an old country, to make a succession of thriving communities at Stratford; and they did thrive, according to the notion of thrift in those days. But we are not to infer that when John Shakspere removed the daughter and heiress of Arden from the old hall of Wilmecote he placed her in some substantial mansion in his corporate town, ornamental as well as solid in its architecture, spacious, convenient, fitted up with taste, if not with splendour. Stratford had, in all likelihood, no such houses to offer; it was a town of wooden houses, a scattered town,—no doubt with gardens separating the low and irregular tenements, sleeping ditches intersecting the properties, and stagnant pools exhaling in the road. A zealous antiquarian has discovered that John Shakspere inhabited a house in Henley Street as early as 1552; and that he, as well as two other neighbours, was fined for making a dung-heap in the street.* In 1553, the jurors of Stratford present certain inhabitants as violators of the municipal laws: from which presentment we learn that ban-dogs were not to go about unmuzzled; nor sheep pastured in the ban-croft for more than an hour each day; nor swine to feed on the common land unringed,† It is evident that Stratford was a rural town, surrounded with common fields, and containing a mixed population of agriculturists and craftsmen. The same character was retained as late as 1618, when the privy council represented to the corporation of Stratford that great and lamentable loss had "happened to that town by casualty of fire, which, of late years, hath been very frequently occasioned by means of thatched cottages, stacks of straw, furzes, and such-like combustible stuff, which are suffered to be erected and made confusedly in most of the principal parts of the town without restraint." ‡ If such were the case when the family of William Shakspere occupied the best house in Stratford,—a house in which Queen Henrietta Maria resided for three weeks, when the royalist army held that part of the country in triumph,—it is not unreasonable to suppose that sixty years earlier the greater number of houses in Stratford must have been mean timber buildings, thatched cottages run up of combustible stuff; and that the house in Henley Street which John Shakspere occupied and purchased, and which his son inherited and bequeathed to his sister for her life, must have been an important house,—a house fit

* Hunter: 'New Illustrations,' vol. i. p. 18.

† The proceedings of the court are given in Mr. Halliwell's 'Life of Shakspeare,' a book which may be fairly held to contain all the documentary evidence of this life which has been discovered.

‡ Chalmers's 'Apology,' p. 618

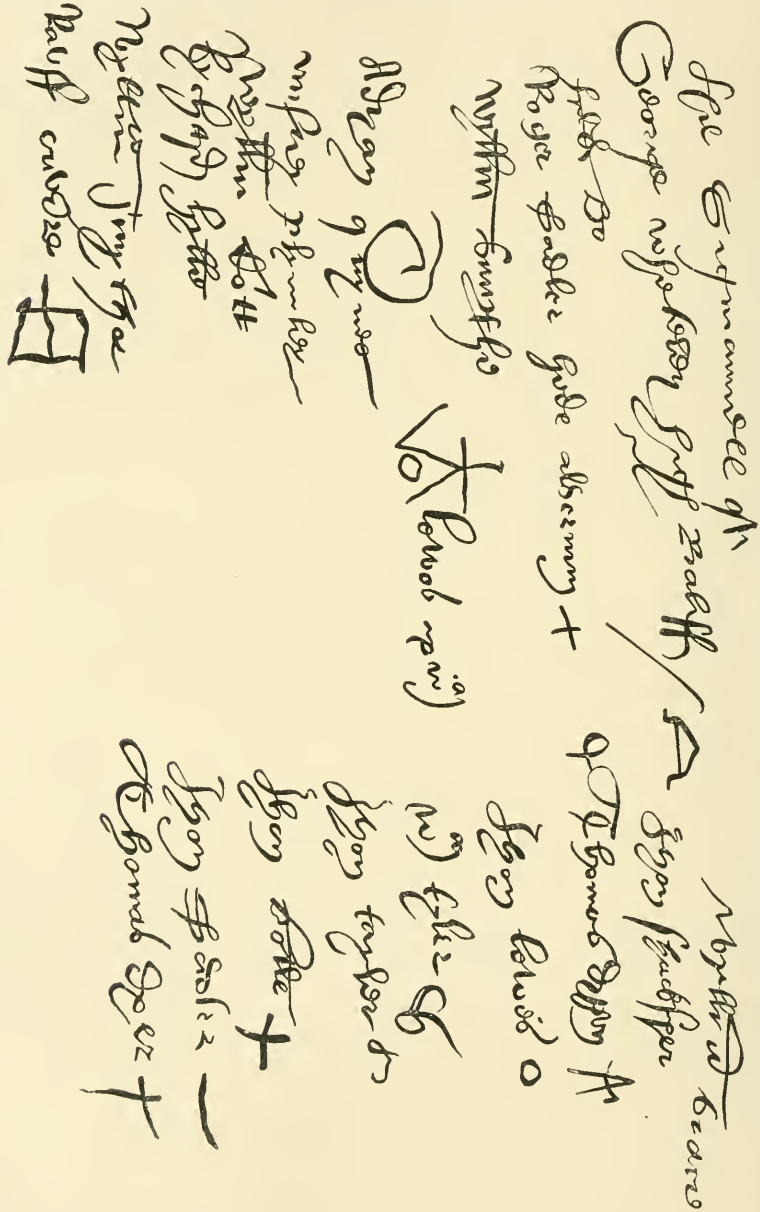
for a man of substance, a house of some space and comfort, compared with those of the majority of the surrounding population.

That population of the corporate town of Stratford, containing within itself rich endowments and all the framework of civil superiority, would appear insignificant in a modern census. The average annual number of baptisms in 1564 was fifty-five; of burials in the same year forty-two: these numbers, upon received principles of calculation, would give us a total population of about one thousand four hundred. In a certificate of charities, &c., in the thirty-seventh year of Henry VIII., the number of "houselyng people" in Stratford is stated to be fifteen hundred. This population was furnished with all the machinery by which Englishmen, even in very early times, managed their own local affairs, and thus obtained that aptitude for practical good government which equally rejects the tyranny of the one or of the many. The corporation in the time of John Shakspere consisted of fourteen aldermen and fourteen burgesses, one of the aldermen being annually elected to the office of bailiff. The bailiff held a court of record every fortnight, for the trial of all causes within the jurisdiction of the borough in which the debt and damages did not amount to thirty pounds. There was a court-leet also, which appointed its ale-tasters, who presided over the just measure and wholesome quality of beer, that necessary of life in ancient times; and which court-leet chose also, annually, four affeerors, who had the power in their hands of summary punishment for offences for which no penalty was prescribed by statute. The constable was the great police officer, and he was a man of importance, for the burgesses of the corporation invariably served the office. John Shakspere appears from the records of Stratford to have gone through the whole regular course of municipal duty. In 1556 he was on the jury of the court-leet; in 1557, an ale-taster; in 1558, a burgess; in 1559, a constable; in 1560, an affeeror; in 1561, a chamberlain; in 1565, an alderman; and in 1568, high bailiff of the borough, the chief magistrate.

There have been endless theories, old and new, affirmations, contradictions, as to the worldly calling of John Shakspere. There are ancient registers in Stratford, minutes of the Common Hall, proceedings of the Court-leet, pleas of the Court of Record, writs, which have been hunted over with unwearied diligence, and yet they tell us nothing, or next to nothing, of John Shakspere. When he was elected an alderman in 1565, we can trace out the occupations of his brother aldermen, and readily come to the conclusion that the municipal authority of Stratford was vested, as we may naturally suppose it to have been, in the hands of substantial tradesmen, brewers, bakers, butchers, grocers, victuallers, mercers, woollen-drapers.* Prying into the secrets of time, we are enabled to form some notion of the literary acquirements of this worshipful body. On rare, very rare occasions, the aldermen and burgesses constituting the town council affixed their signatures, for greater solemnity, to some order of the court; and on the 29th of September, in the seventh of Elizabeth, upon an order that John Wheler should take the office of bailiff, we have nineteen names subscribed, aldermen and burgesses. Out of the nineteen six only

* See Malone's 'Life of Shakspeare,' Boswell's Malone, vol. ii. p. 77.

can say, "I thank God I have been so well brought up that I can write my name,"* The stock of literary acquirement amongst the magnates of Stratford was not very large. And why should that stock of literature have been larger? There were some who had been at the grammar-school, and they perhaps were



* Henry VI., Part II., Act IV.

as learned as the town-clerk; they kept him straight. But there had been enough turmoil about learning in those days to make goodman Whetely, and goodman Cardre, and their fellows, somewhat shy of writing and Latin. They were not quite safe in reading. Some of the readers had openly looked upon Tyndale's Bible and Coverdale's Bible twelve years before, and then the Bible was to be hidden in dark corners. It was come out again, but who could tell what might again happen. It was safer not to read. It was much less troublesome not to write. The town-clerk was a good penman; they could flourish.

We were reluctant to yield our assent to Malone's assertion that Shakspere's father had a mark to himself. The marks are not distinctly affixed to each name in this document. But subsequent discoveries establish the fact that he used two marks—one, something like an open pair of compasses—the other, the common cross. Even half a century later, to write was not held indispensable by persons of some pretension. In Decker's 'Wonder of a Kingdom,' the following dialogue takes place between Gentili and Buzardo:

"*Gen.* What qualities are you furnished with?
Buz. My education has been like a gentleman.
Gen. Have you any skill in song or instrument?
Buz. As a gentleman should have; I know all but play on none. I am no barber.
Gen. Barber! no, sir, I think it. Are you a linguist?
Buz. As a gentleman ought to be; one tongue serves one head; I am no pedlar, to travel countries.
Gen. What skill ha' you in horsemanship?
Buz. As other gentlemen have: I ha' rid some beasts in my time.
Gen. Can you write and read this?
Buz. As most of your gentlemen do; my bond has been taken with my mark at it."

We must not infer that one who gave his bond with his mark at it, was necessarily ignorant of all literature. It was very common for an individual to adopt, in the language of Jack Cade, "a mark to himself," possessing distinctness of character, and almost heraldically alluding to his name or occupation. Many of these are like ancient merchants' marks; and on some old deeds the mark of a landowner alienating property corresponds with the mark described in the conveyance as cut in the turf, or upon boundary stones, of unenclosed fields. Lord Campbell says, "In my own experience I have known many instances of documents bearing a mark as the signature of persons who could write well."*

One of the aldermen of Stratford in 1565, John Wheler, is described in the town records as a yeoman. He must have been dwelling in Stratford, for we have seen that he was ordered to take the office of high bailiff, an office demanding a near and constant residence. We can imagine a moderate landed proprietor cultivating his own soil, renting perhaps other land, seated as conveniently in a house in the town of Stratford as in a solitary grange several miles away from it. Such a proprietor, cultivator, yeoman, we consider John Shakspere to have been. In 1556, the year that Robert, the father of Mary

* 'Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements,' p. 15.

Arden, died, John Shakspere was admitted at the court-leet to two copyhold estates in Stratford. The jurors of the leet present that George Turnor had alienated to John Shakspere and his heirs one tenement, with a garden and croft, and other premises, in Grenehyll Street, held of the lord at an annual quit-rent; and John Shakspere, who is present in court and does fealty, is admitted to the same. The same jurors present that Edward West has alienated to John Shakspere one tenement and a garden adjacent in Henley Street, who is in the same way admitted, upon fealty done to the lord. Here then is John Shakspere, before his marriage, the purchaser of two copyholds in Stratford, both with gardens, and one with a croft, or small enclosed field.* In 1570 John Shakspere is holding, as tenant under William Clopton, a meadow of fourteen acres, with its appurtenance, called Ingon, at the annual rent of eight pounds. This rent, equivalent to at least forty pounds of our present money, would indicate that the appurtenance included a house,—and a very good house.† This meadow of Ingon forms part of a large property known by that name near Clopton-house.‡ When John Shakspere married, the estate of Asbies,

* It is marvellous that Malone, with these documents before him, which are clearly the admissions of John Shakspere to two copyhold estates, should say:—"At the court-leet, held in October, 1556, the *lease of a house* in Greenhill Street was assigned to Mr. John Shakspeare, by George Turnor, who was one of the burgesses of Stratford, and kept a tavern or victualling-house there; and another, in Henley Street, was, on the same day, assigned to him, by Edward West, a person of some consideration, who during the reign of Edward VI. had been frequently one of the wardens of the bridge of Stratford." It is equally wonderful that, Malone having printed the documents, no one who writes about Shakspere has deduced from them that Shakspere's father was necessarily a person of some substance before his marriage, a purchaser of property. The roll says—"et idē Johēs pd. in cur. fecit dño fidelitatem p^{r} eisdem," that is, "and the said John in the aforesaid court did fealty to the lord for the same." Every one knows that this is the mode of admission to a copyhold estate in fee simple, and yet Malone writes as if these forms were gone through to enable John Shakspere to occupy two houses in two distinct streets, *under lease*. We subjoin the documents:—

"Stratford super Avon. Vis frā Pleg. cum cur. et Session pāis tenit. ībm. secundo die Octobris annis regnorum Philippi et Marie, Dei gratia, &c. tertio et quarto (October 2, 1556).

"It. pre. quod Georgius Turnor alienavit Johē Shakespere et hered. suis unum tent. cum gardin. et croft. cum pertinent in Grenehyll stret, tent. de Dño lībe p^{r} cart. p^{r} redd. inde dño p^{r} annu vi^{d} et sect. cur. et idē Johēs pd. in cur. fecit dño fidelitatem p^{r} eisdem.

"It. quod Edwardus West alienavit pd. eo Johē Shakespere unū tent. cum gardin. adjacen. in Henley street p^{r} redd. inde dño p^{r} ann. vi^{d} et sect. cur. et idē Johēs pd. in cur. fecit fidelitatem."

We give a translation of this entry upon the court-roll:—

"Stratford upon Avon. View of Frankpledge with the court and session of the peace held of the same on the second day of October in the year of the reign of Philip and Mary, by the grace of God, &c., the third and fourth.

"Item, they present that George Turnor has alienated to John Shakspere and his heirs one tenement with a garden and croft, with their appurtenances, in Greenhill street, held of the lord, and delivered according to the roll, for the rent from thence to the lord of sixpence per annum, and suit of court, and the said John in the aforesaid court did fealty to the lord for the same.

"Item, that Edward West has alienated to him, the aforesaid John Shakspere, one tenement, with a garden adjacent, in Henley Street, for the rent from thence to the lord of sixpence per annum, and suit of court, and the said John in the aforesaid court did fealty."

† See the extracts from the 'Rot. Claus.,' 23 Eliz, given in Malone's 'Life,' p. 95.

‡ Ingon is not, as Malone states, situated at a small distance from the estate which William Shakspere purchased in 1602. Clopton lies between the two properties.

within a short ride of Stratford, came also into his possession, and so did some landed property at Snitterfield. With these facts before us, scanty as they are, can we reasonably doubt that John Shakspere was living upon his own land, renting the land of others, actively engaged in the business of cultivation, in an age when tillage was becoming rapidly profitable,—so much so that men of wealth very often thought it better to take the profits direct than to share them with the tenant? In 'A Briefe Conceipte touching the Commonweale of this Realme of Englande,' published in 1581,—a Dialogue once attributed to William Shakspere,—the Knight says, speaking of his class, "Many of us are enforced either to keep pieces of our own lands when they fall in our own possession, or to purchase some farm of other men's lands, and to store it with sheep or some other cattle, to help make up the decay in our revenues, and to maintain our old estate withal, and yet all is little enough."

The belief that the father of Shakspere was a small landed proprietor and cultivator, employing his labour and capital in various modes which grew out of the occupation of land, offers a better, because a more natural, explanation of the circumstances connected with the early life of the great poet than those stories which would make him of obscure birth and servile employments. Take old Aubrey's story, the shrewd learned gossip and antiquary, who survived Shakspere some eighty years:—"Mr. William Shakespear was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick. His father was a butcher, and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours that when he was a boy he exercised his father's trade; but when he killed a calf he would do it in high style, and make a speech. There was at that time another butcher's son in this town that was held not at all inferior to him for a natural wit, his acquaintance and coetanean, but died young." Oh, Stratford! town prolific in heroic and poetical butchers; was it not enough that there was one prodigy born in your bosom, who, "when he killed a calf, he would do it in a high style, and make a speech," but that there must even have been another butcher's son fed with thy intellectual milk, "that was held not at all inferior to him for a natural wit?" Wert thou minded to rival Ipswich by a double rivalry? Was not one Shakspere-butcher enough to extinguish the light of one Wolsey, but thou must have another, "his acquaintance and coetanean?' Aubrey, men must believe thee in all after-time; for did not Farmer aver that, when he that killed the calf wrote—

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will,"*—

the poet-butcher was thinking of *skewers?* And did not Malone hold that he who, when a boy, exercised his father's trade, has described the process of calf-killing with an accuracy which nothing but profound experience could give?—

> "And as the butcher takes away the calf,
> And binds the wretch, and beats it when it strays,
> Bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house;
> Even so, remorseless, have they borne him hence.

* Hamlet, Act v., Scene ii.

> And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
> Looking the way her harmless young one went,
> And can do nought but wail her darling's loss,
> Even so," &c.*

The story, however, has a variation. There was at Stratford, in the year 1693, a clerk of the parish church, eighty years old,—that is, he was three years old when William Shakspere died,—and he, pointing to the monument of the poet, with the pithy remark that he was the "best of his family," proclaimed to a member of one of the Inns of Court that "this Shakespeare was formerly in this town bound apprentice to a butcher, but that he ran from his master to London."† His father was a butcher, says Aubrey; he was apprentice to a butcher, says the parish clerk. Aubrey was picking up his gossip for his friend Anthony-a-Wood in 1680, and it is not very difficult to imagine that the identical parish clerk was his authority. That honest chronicler, old as he was, had forty years of tradition to deal with in this matter of the butcher's son and the butcher's apprentice; and the result of such glimpses into the thick night of the past is sensibly enough stated by Aubrey himself:—"What uncertainty do we find in printed histories! They either treading too near on the heels of truth, that they dare not speak plain; or else for want of intelligence (things being antiquated) become too obscure and dark!" Obscure and dark indeed is this story of the butcher's son. If it were luminous, circumstantially true, palpable to all sense, as Aubrey writes it down, we should only have one more knot to cut, not to untie, in the matters which belong to William Shakspere. The son of the butcher of Ipswich was the boy bachelor of Oxford at fifteen years of age; he had an early escape from the calf-killing; there was no miracle in his case. If we receive Aubrey's story we must take it also with its contradictions, and that perhaps will get rid of the miraculous. "When he was a boy he exercised his father's trade." Good:—"This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess about eighteen." Good:—"He understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country." Killer of calves, schoolmaster, poet, actor,—all these occupations crowded into eighteen years! Honest Aubrey, truly thine is a rope of sand wherein there are no knots to cut or to untie!

Akin to the butcher's trade is that of the dealer in wool. It is upon the authority of Betterton, the actor, who, in the beginning of the last century, made a journey into Warwickshire to collect anecdotes relating to Shakspere, that Rowe tells us that John Shakspere was a dealer in wool:—"His family, as appears by the register and the public writings relating to that town, were of good figure and fashion there, and are mentioned as gentlemen. His father, who was a considerable dealer in wool, had so large a family, ten children in all, that, though he was his eldest son, he could give him no better education than his own employment." We are now peeping "through the blanket of the dark." But daylight is not as yet. Malone was a believer in Rowe's account; and he

* Henry VI., Part II., Act III., Scene I.

† Traditionary Anecdotes of Shakespeare.

was confirmed in his belief by possessing a piece of stained glass, bearing the arms of the merchants of the staple, which had been removed from a window of John Shakspere's house in Henley Street. But, unfortunately for the credibility of Rowe, as then held, Malone made a discovery, as it is usual to term such glimpses of the past: "I began to despair of ever being able to obtain any certain intelligence concerning his trade; when, at length, I met with the following entry, in a very ancient manuscript, containing an account of the proceedings in the bailiff's court, which furnished me with the long-sought-for information, and ascertains that the trade of our great poet's father was that of a *glover*;" "Thomas Siche de Arscotte in com. Wigorn. queritr versus *John Shakyspere* de Stretford, in com. Warwic. *Glover*, in plac. quod reddat ei oct. libras, &c." This Malone held to be decisive.

We give this record above as Malone printed it, not very correctly; and having seen the original, we maintained that the word was not *Glover*. Mr. Collier and Mr. Halliwell affirm that the word *Glo*, with the second syllable contracted, is glover; and we accept their interpretation. But we still hold to our original belief that he was, in 1556, a landed proprietor and an occupier of land; one who, although sued as a glover on the 17th June of that year, was a suitor in the same court on the 19th November, in a plea against a neighbour for unjustly detaining eighteen quarters of barley. We still refuse to believe that John Shakspere, when he is described as a *yeoman* in after years, "had relinquished his *retail* trade," as Mr. Halliwell judges; or that his mark, according to the same authority, was emblematical of the glove-sticks used for stretching the cheveril for fair fingers. We have no confidence that he had stores in Henley Street of the treasures of Autolycus,—

"Gloves as sweet as damask roses."

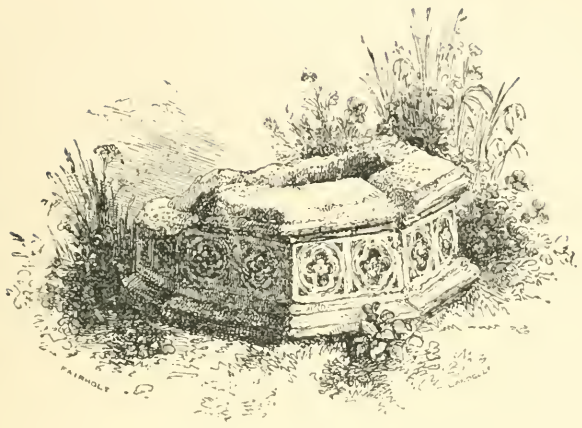
We think, that butcher, dealer in wool, glover, may all be reconciled with our position, that he was a landed proprietor, occupying land. Our proofs are not purely hypothetical.

Harrison, who mingles laments at the increasing luxury of the farmer, with somewhat contradictory denouncements of the oppression of the tenant by the landlord, holds that the landlord is monopolizing the tenant's profits. His complaints are the natural commentary upon the social condition of England, described in 'A Briefe Conceipte touching the Commonweale.'—"Most sorrowful of all to understand, that men of great port and countenance are so far from suffering their farmers to have any gain at all, that *they themselves become* GRAZIERS, BUTCHERS, TANNERS, SHEEPMASTERS, WOODMEN, *and denique quid non*, thereby to enrich themselves, and bring all the wealth of the country into their own hands, leaving the commonalty weak, or as an idol with broken or feeble arms, which may in time of peace have a plausible show, but, when necessity shall enforce, have an heavy and bitter sequel." Has not Harrison solved the mystery of the *butcher;* explained the tradition of the *wool-merchant;* shown how John Shakspere, the *woodman*, naturally sold a piece of timber to the corporation, which we find recorded; and, what is most difficult of credence, indicated how the *glover* is reconcilable with all these employments? We open an authentic

record of this very period, and the solution of the difficulty is palpable: In John Strype's 'Memorials Ecclesiastical under Queen Mary I,' under the date of 1558, we find this passage: "It is certain that one Edward Horne suffered at Newent, where this Deighton had been, and spake with one or two of the same parish that did see him there burnt, and did testify that they knew the two persons that made the fire to burn him; they were two *glovers* or FELLMONGERS." * A fellmonger and a glover appear from this passage to have been one and the same. The fellmonger is he who prepares skins for the use of the leather-dresser, by separating the wool from the hide—the natural coadjutor of the sheep-master and the wool-man. Shakspere himself implies that the glover was a manufacturer of skins: Dame Quickly asks of Slender's man, "Does he not wear a *great round* beard like a *glover's paring knife?*" The peltry is shaved upon a circular board, with a *great round* knife, to this day. The fellmonger's trade, as it now exists, and the trade in untanned leather, the glover's trade, would be so slightly different, that the generic term, glover, might be applied to each. There are few examples of the word "fellmonger" in any early writers. "Glover" is so common that it has become one of the universal English names derived from occupation,—far more common than if it merely applied to him who made coverings for the hands. At Coventry, in the middle of the sixteenth century, (the period of which we are writing) the *Glovers* and *Whittawers* formed one craft. A whittawer is one who prepares *tawed* leather—untanned leather—leather chiefly dressed from sheep skins and lamb skins by a simple process of soaking, and scraping, and liming, and softening by alum and salt. Of such were the large and coarse gloves in use in a rural district, even amongst labourers; and such process might be readily carried on by one engaged in agricultural operations, especially when we bear in mind that the *white leather* was the especial leather of "husbandly furniture," as described by old Tusser.

We may reasonably persist, therefore, even in accord with "flesh and fell" tradition, in drawing the portrait of Shakspere's father, at the time of his marriage, in the free air,—on his horse, with his team, at market, at fair—and yet a dealer in carcases, or wood, or wool, or skins, his own produce. He was a proprietor of land, and an agriculturist, living in a peculiar state of society, as we shall see hereafter, in which the division of employments was imperfectly established, and the small rural capitalists strove to turn their own products to the greatest advantage.

* Vol. v., p. 277- edit. 1816.



[Ancient Font, formerly in Stratford Church.*]

CHAPTER III.

THE REGISTER.

In the eleventh century the Norman Conqueror commanded a Register to be completed of the lands of England, with the names of their possessors, and the number of their free tenants, their villains, and their slaves. In the sixteenth century Thomas Cromwell, as the vicegerent of Henry VIII. for ecclesiastical jurisdiction, issued Injunctions to the Clergy, ordaining, amongst other matters, that every officiating minister shall, for every Church, keep a Book, wherein he shall register every Marriage, Christening, or Burial. In the different character of these two Registers we read what five centuries of civilization had effected for England. Instead of being recorded in the gross as *cotarii* or *servi*,

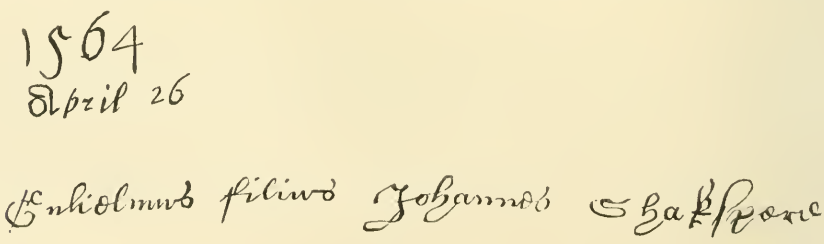
* The history of the old font represented above is somewhat curious. The parochial accounts of Stratford show that about the middle of the seventeenth century a new font was set up. The beautiful relic of an older time, from which William Shakspere had received the baptismal water, was, after many years, found in the old charnel-house. When that was pulled down, it was kicked into the churchyard; and half a century ago was removed by the parish clerk to form the trough of a pump at his cottage. Of the parish clerk it was bought by the late Captain Saunders; and from his possession came into that of Mr. Heritage, a builder at Stratford.

the meanest labourer, his wife, and his children, had become children of their country and their country's religion, as much as the highest lord and his family. Their names were to be inscribed in a book and carefully preserved. But the people doubted the intent of this wise and liberal injunction. A friend of Cromwell writes to him, "There is much secret and several communications between the King's subjects; and [some] of them, in sundry places within the shires of Cornwall and Devonshire, be in great fear and mistrust, what the King's Highness and his Council should mean, to give in commandment to the parsons and vicars of every parish that they should make a book, and surely to be kept, wherein to be specified the names of as many as be wedded, and the names of them that be buried, and of all those that be christened."* They dreaded new "charges;" and well they might dread. But Thomas Cromwell had not regal exactions in his mind. The Registers were at first imperfectly kept; but the regulation of 1538 was strictly enforced in the first year of Elizabeth; and then the Register of the Parish of Stratford-upon-Avon commences, that is, in 1558.

Venerable book! Every such record of human life is a solemn document. Birth, Marriage, Death!—this is the whole history of the sojourn upon earth of nearly every name inscribed in these mouldy, stained, blotted pages. And after a few years what is the interest, even to their own descendants, of these brief annals? With the most of those for whom the last entry is still to be made, the question is, Did they leave property? Is some legal verification of their possession of property necessary?—

"No further seek their merits to disclose."

But there are entries in this Register-book of Stratford that are interesting to *us*—to all Englishmen—to universal mankind. We have all received a precious legacy from one whose progress from the cradle to the grave is here recorded—a bequest large enough for us all, and for all who will come after us. Pause we on the *one* entry of that book which most concerns the human race:—



Thus far the information conveyed by the register is precise.† But a natural question then arises. On what day was born William, the son of John Shakspere

* Cromwell's Correspondence in the Chapter-House. Quoted in Rickman's Preface to Population Returns, 1831.

† The date of the year, and the word April, occur three lines above the entry—the baptism being the fourth registered in that month. The register of Stratford is a tall narrow book, of considerable thickness, the leaves formed of very fine vellum. But this book is only a transcript, attested by the vicar and four churchwardens, on every page of the registers from 1558 to 1600. The above is therefore not a fac-simile of the original entry.

who was baptized on the 26th of April, 1564? The want of such information is a defect in all parish registers. In the belief that baptism very quickly followed birth in those times, when infancy was surrounded with greater dangers than in our own days of improved medical science, we have been accustomed to receive the 23rd of April as the day on which William Shakspere first saw the light. We are very unwilling to assist in disturbing the popular belief, but it is our duty to state the facts opposed to it. We have before us 'An Argument on the assumed Birthday of Shakspere: reduced to shape A.D. 1864.' This privately-printed tract by Mr. Bolton Corney, is one of the many evidences of the industry and logical acuteness with which that gentleman has approached the solution of many doubtful literary questions. It is to do injustice to the force of his argument that we can here only present the briefest analysis of the points which he fully sets forth. In the original edition of this Biography, we stated that there was no direct evidence that Shakspere was born on the 23rd of April. We added that there was probably a tradition to that effect; for some years ago the Rev. Joseph Greene, a master of the Grammar School at Stratford, in an extract which he made from the register of Shakspere's baptism, wrote in the margin "Born on the 23rd." The labours of Mr. Bolton Corney furnish the means of testing the value of this memorandum. It was first given to the world in the edition of Johnson and Steevens in 1773, of which edition Steevens was the sole editor. After giving Greene's extract from the register, he says that he was favoured with it by the Hon. James West. Up to the publication of Rowe's edition in 1709, the writers who mention Shakspere merely say, "born at Stratford-upon-Avon." Rowe says "he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, in April, 1564"—a fact never before stated. Of the date of the birth Rowe says nothing. The particulars of Rowe's life of the poet, prefixed to the edition of 1709, were furnished by Betterton, the actor, who, to follow up the information which he might have derived from the traditions of the theatre, made a journey to Stratford to glean new materials for his scanty stock of biographical facts. If the day of Shakspere's birth were not a tradition in Shakspere's native place ninety-three years after his death, it is not very credible that a trustworthy tradition had survived until 1773, when Greene wrote his memorandum which Steevens first published. In the second edition of Johnson and Steevens' Shakspere, in 1778, Malone makes this note upon Rowe's statement that Shakspere died in the fifty-third year of his age: "He died on his birthday, 1616, and had exactly completed his fifty-second year." In the edition of Shakspere by Boswell, in 1821, Malone, whose posthumous life was here first given, doubts the fact that Shakspere was born three days before April the 26th. "I have said this on the faith of Mr Greene, who, I find, made the extract from the register which Mr. West gave Mr. Steevens; but quære how did Mr. Greene ascertain this fact?" Lastly, there arises the question whether the theory that Shakspere died on his birthday is to be traced to the inscription on the tomb:—

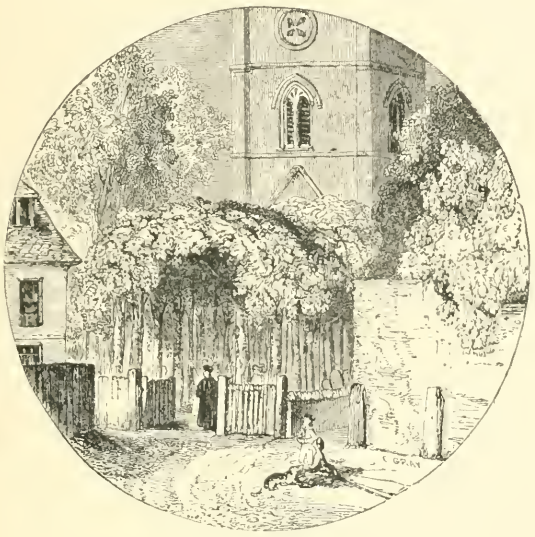
OBIIT AN. DOM. 1616. ÆTATIS 53. DIE 23. AP.

Mr. Collier has said, in his edition of 1844: "The inscription on his monument supports the opinion that he was born on the 23rd April. Without the contrac-

tions it runs thus: 'Obiit Anno Domini 1616. Ætatis 53, die 23 Aprilis.' And this, in truth, is the only piece of evidence upon the point." Mr. Bolton Corney thus somewhat triumphantly meets this interpretation "The inscription contains no evidence in favour of the assumed birthday. It refutes the assertion *sans réplique!* As Shakspere died on the 23 April, in his *fifty-third* year, he must have been born *before the* 23 *April*, 1564." Oldys (who died in 1761), in his manuscript annotations upon Langbaine's 'Account of the English Dramatic Poets' (a book now to be seen in the Library of the British Museum), has an interpretation upon the inscription on the monument which he finds in Langbaine. Mr. Bolton Corney thus disposes of the worthy antiquary's theory: "Oldys, in some non-lucid moment, underscores *die* 23 *Apr.*—subtracts 53 from 1616—and writes down 1563. He assumes that the words *anno ætatis* 53 are equivalent to *vixit annos* 53, and that the words *die* 23 *Aprilis* refer to *anno ætatis*, instead of being the object of Obiit. Such is the process, *never before described*, by which the birthday of Shakspere was discovered!"

We turn back to the first year of the egistry, 1558, for other records of John Shakspere's family; and we find the baptism of Joan, daughter to John Shakspere, on the 15th of September. Again, in 1562, on the 2nd of December, Margaret, daughter to John Shakspere, is baptized. In the entry of burials in 1563 we find, under date of April 30, that Margaret closed a short life in five months. The elder daughter Joan also died young. We look forward, and in 1566 find the birth of another son registered:—Gilbert, son of John Shakspere, was baptized on the 13th of October of that year. In 1569 there is the registry of the baptism of a daughter, Joan, daughter of John Shakspere, on the 15th of April. Thus, the registry of a second Joan leaves no reasonable doubt that the first died, and that a favourite name was preserved in the family. In 1571 Anne is baptized; she died in 1579. In 1573–4 another son was baptized—Richard, son of Master (*Magister*) John Shakspere, on the 11th of March. The last entry, which determines the extent of John Shakspere's family, is that of Edmund, son of Master John Shakspere, baptized on the 3rd of May, 1580. Here, then, we find that two sisters of William were removed by death, probably before his birth. In two years and a half another son, Gilbert, came to be his playmate; and when he was five years old that most precious gift to a loving boy was granted, a sister, who grew up with him. When he was ten years old he had another brother to lead by the hand into the green meadows. Then came another sister, who faded untimely; and when he was grown into youthful strength, a boy of sixteen, his youngest brother was born. William, Gilbert, Joan, Richard, Edmund, constituted the whole of the family amongst whom John Shakspere was to share his means of existence. Rowe, we have already seen, mentions the large family of John Shakspere, "ten children in all." Malone has established very satisfactorily the origin of this error into which Rowe has fallen. In later years there was another John Shakspere in Stratford. In the books of the corporation the name of John Shakspere, shoemaker, can be traced in 1580; in the register in 1584 we find him married to Margery Roberts,

who dies in 1587; he is, without doubt, married a second time, for in 1589, 1590, and 1591, Ursula, Humphrey, and Philip are born. It is unquestionable that these are not the children of the father of William Shakspere, for they are entered in the register as the daughter, or sons, of John Shakspere, without the style which our John Shakspere always bore after 1569—"*Magister.*" There can be no doubt that the mother of all the children of *Master* John Shakspere was Mary Arden; for in proceedings in Chancery in 1597, which we shall notice hereafter, it is set forth that John Shakspere and his wife Mary, in the



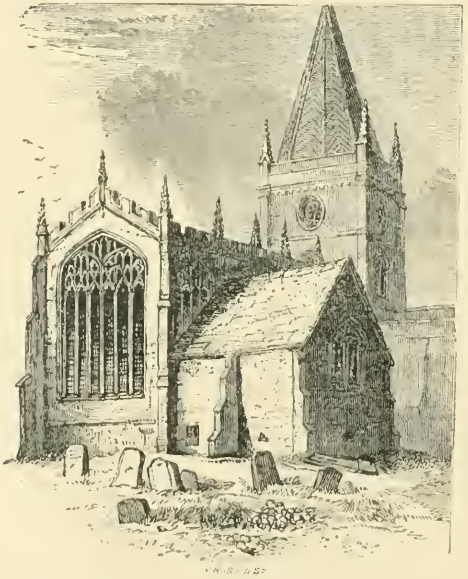
[The Church Avenue.]

20th Elizabeth, 1577, mortgaged her inheritance of Asbies. Nor can there be a doubt that the children born before 1569, when he is styled John Shakspere, without the honourable addition of *Master*, were also *her* children; for in 1599, when *William* Shakspere is an opulent man, application is made to the College of Arms, that John Shakspere, and his issue and posterity, might use a "shield of arms," impaled with the arms of Shakspere and Arden. This application (which appears also to have been made in 1596, as the grant of arms by Dethick states the fact of John Shakspere's marriage) would in all probability have been at the instance of John Shakspere's eldest son and heir. The history of the family up to the period of William Shakspere's manhood is as clear as can reasonably be expected.

William Shakspere has been carried to the baptismal font in that fine old church of Stratford. The "thick-pleached alley" that leads through the churchyard to the porch is putting forth its buds and leaves.* The chestnut hangs its white blossoms over the grassy mounds of that resting-place. All is joyous in the spring sunshine.

* It is supposed that such a green avenue was an old appendage to the church, the present trees having taken the place of more ancient ones.

Kind neighbours are smiling upon the happy father; maidens and matrons snatch a kiss of the sleeping boy. There is "a spirit of life in everything" on this 26th of April, 1564. Summer comes, but it brings not joy to Stratford. There is wailing in her streets and woe in her houses. The death-register tells a fearful history. From the 30th June to the 31st December, two hundred and thirty-eight inhabitants, a sixth of the population, are carried to the grave. The plague is in the fated town; the doors are marked with the red cross, and the terrible inscription, "Lord, have mercy upon us." It is the same epidemic which ravaged Europe in that year; which in the previous year had desolated London, and still continued there; of which sad time Stow pithily says—"The poor citizens of London were this year plagued with a threefold plague, pestilence, scarcity of money, and dearth of victuals; the misery whereof were too long here to write: no doubt the poor remember it; the rich by flight into the countries made shift for themselves." Scarcity of money and dearth of victuals are the harbingers and the ministers of pestilence. Despair gathers up itself to die. Labour goes not forth to its accustomed duties. Shops are closed. The market-cross hears no hum of trade. The harvest lies almost ungathered in the fields. At last the destroying angel has gone on his way. The labourers are thinned; there is more demand for labour; "victuals" are not more abundant, but there are fewer left to share the earth's bounty. Then the adult rush into marriage. A year of pestilence is followed by a year of weddings;* and such a "strange eventful history" does the Stratford register tell. The Charnel-house—a melancholy-looking appendage to the chancel of Stratford Church, (now removed,) had then its heaps of unhonoured bones fearfully disturbed: but soon the old tower heard again the wedding peal. The red



[Stratford Church: East End, with Charnel-House.]

* See 'Malthus on Population,' book ii., chap. 12.

cross was probably not on the door of John Shakspere's dwelling. "Fortunately for mankind," says Malone, "it did not reach the house where the infant Shakspere lay; for not one of that name appears on the dead list. A poetical enthusiast will find no difficulty in believing that, like Horace, he reposed secure and fearless in the midst of contagion and death, protected by the Muses to whom his future life was to be devoted:—

'sacrâ
Lauroque, collatâque myrto,
Non sine diis animosus infans.'"

There were more real dangers around Shakspere than could be averted by the sacred laurel and the myrtle—something more fearful than the serpent and the bear of the Roman poet.* *He*, by whom

"Spirits are not finely touch'd
But to fine issues,"

may be said, without offence, to have guarded this unconscious child. William Shakspere was to be an instrument, and a great one, in the intellectual advancement of mankind. The guards that He placed around that threshold of Stratford, as secondary ministers, were cleanliness, abundance, free air, parental watchfulness. The "*non sine diis*"—the "protected by the Muses,"—rightly considered, must mean the same guardianship. Each is a recognition of something higher than accident and mere physical laws.

The parish of Stratford, then, was unquestionably the birth-place of William Shakspere. But in what part of Stratford dwelt his parents in the year 1564? It was ten years after this that his father became the purchaser of two freehold houses in Henley Street—houses which still exist—houses which the *people* of England have agreed to preserve as a precious relic of their greatest brother. Nine years before William Shakspere was born, his father had also purchased two copyhold tenements in Stratford—one in Greenfield Street, one in Henley Street. The copyhold house in Henley Street, purchased in 1555, was unquestionably not one of the freehold houses in the same street, purchased in 1574: yet, from Malone's loose way of stating that in 1555 the *lease* of a House in Henley Street was assigned to John Shakspere, it has been conjectured that he purchased in 1574 the house he had occupied for many years. As he purchased two houses in 1555 in different parts of the town, it is not likely that he occupied both; he might not have occupied either. Before he purchased the two houses in Henley Street, in 1574, he occupied fourteen acres of meadow-land, with appurtenances, at a very high rent; the property is called Ingon meadow in "the Close Rolls." Dugdale calls the place where it was situated "Inge;" saying that it was a member of the manor of Old Stratford, and "signifyeth in our old English a meadow or low ground, the name well agreeing with its situation." It is about a mile and a quarter from the town of Stratford, on the road to Warwick. William Shakspere, then, might have been born at either of his father's copyhold houses, in Greenhill Street, or in Henley Street; he might have been born at Ingon; or his father might have occupied one of the two freehold

* Hor. lib. iii., car. iv.

houses in Henley Street at the time of the birth of his eldest son. Tradition says that William Shakspere *was* born in one of these houses; tradition points out the very room in which he was born.

Whether Shakspere were born here or not, there can be little doubt that this property was the home of his boyhood. It was purchased by John Shakspere, from Edmund Hall and Emma his wife, for forty pounds. In a copy of the chirograph of the fine levied on this occasion (which came into the possession of Mr. Wheler, of Stratford), the property is described as two messuages, two gardens, and two orchards, with their appurtenances. This document does not define the situation of the property, beyond its being in Stratford-upon-Avon; but in the deed of sale of another property in 1591, that property is described as situate between the houses of Robert Johnson and John Shakspere; and in 1597 John Shakspere himself sells a "toft, or parcel of land," in Henley Street, to the purchaser of the property in 1591. The properties can be traced, and leave no doubt of this house in Henley Street being the residence of John Shakspere. He retained the property during his life; and it descended, as his heir-at-law, to his son William. In the last testament of the poet is this bequest to his "sister Joan:"—"I do will and devise unto her the house, with the appurtenances, in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her natural life, under the yearly rent of twelve-pence." His sister Joan, whose name by marriage was Hart, was residing there in 1639, and she probably continued to reside there till her death in 1646. The *one* house in which Mrs. Hart resided was doubtless the half of the building that formed, twenty years ago, the butcher's shop and the tenement adjoining; for the other house was known as the Maidenhead Inn in 1642. In another part of Shakspere's will he bequeaths, amongst the bulk of his property, to his eldest daughter, Susanna Hall, with remainder to her male issue, "two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley Street, within the borough of Stratford." There were existing settlements of this very property in the family of Shakspere's eldest daughter and grand-daughter; and this grand-daughter, Elizabeth Nash, who was married a second time to Sir John Barnard, left both houses,—namely, "the inn, called the Maidenhead, and the adjoining house and barn,"—to her kinsmen Thomas and George Hart, the grandsons of her grandfather's "sister Joan." These persons left descendants, with whom this property remained until the beginning of the present century. But it was gradually diminished. The orchards and gardens were originally extensive: a century ago tenements had been built upon them, and they were alienated by the Hart then in possession. The Maidenhead Inn became the Swan Inn, and afterwards the Swan and Maidenhead. The White Lion, on the other side of the property, was extended, so as to include the remaining orchards and gardens. The house in which Mrs. Hart had lived so long became divided into two tenements; and at the end of the last century the lower part of one was a butcher's shop. According to the Aubrey tradition, some persons believed this to have been the original shop where John Shakspere pursued his calf-killing vocation with the aid of his illustrious son. Mr. Wheler, in a very interesting account of these premises, and their mutations, published in 1824, tells us that

the butcher-occupant, some thirty years ago, having an eye to every gainful attraction, wrote up,

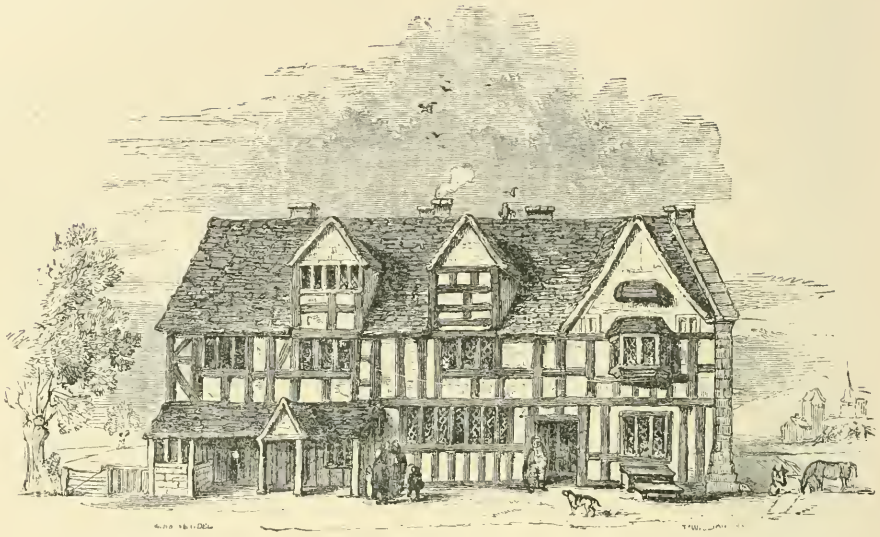
"WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE WAS BORN IN THIS HOUSE.
N.B.—A HORSE AND TAXED CART TO LET."

It ceased to be used as a butcher's shop, but there were the arrangements for a butcher's trade in the lower room—the cross beams with hooks, and the window-board for joints.

In 1823, when we made our first pilgrimage to Stratford, the house had gone out of the family of the Harts, and the last alleged descendant was recently ejected. It had been a gainful trade to her for some years to show the old kitchen behind the shop, and the honoured bed-room. When the poor old woman, the last of the Harts, had to quit her vocation (she claimed to have inherited some of the genius, if she had lost the possessions, of her great ancestor, for she had produced a marvellous poem on the Battle of Waterloo), she set up a rival show-shop on the other side of the street, filled with all sorts of trumpery relics pretended to have belonged to Shakspere. But she was in ill odour. In a fit of resentment, the day before she quitted the ancient house, she whitewashed the walls of the bed-room, so as to obliterate the pencil inscriptions with which they were covered. It was the work of her successor to remove the plaster; and manifold names, obscure or renowned, again saw the light. The house had a few ancient articles of furniture about it; but there was nothing which could be considered as originally belonging to it as the home of William Shakspere.

The engravings exhibit John Shakspere's houses in Henley Street under two aspects. The upper one is from an original drawing made by Colonel Delamotte in 1788. The houses, it will be observed, then presented one uniform front; and there were dormer windows connected with rooms in the roof. We have a plan before us, accompanying Mr. Wheler's account of these premises, which shows that they occupied a frontage of thirty-one feet. The lower is from an original drawing made by Mr. Pyne, after a sketch by Mr. Edridge in 1807. We now see that the dormer windows are removed, as also the gable at the east end of the front. The house has been shorn of much of its external importance. There is a lithograph engraving in Mr. Wheler's account, published in 1824. The premises, as there shown, have been pretty equally divided. The Swan and Maidenhead half has had its windows modernized, and the continuation of the timber-frame has been obliterated by a brick casing. In 1807, we observe that the western half had been divided into two tenements;—the fourth of the whole premises, that is the butcher's shop, the kitchen behind, and the two rooms over, being the portion commonly shown as Shakspere's House. Some years ago, upon a frontage in continuation of the tenement at the west, three small cottages were built. The whole of this portion of the property has been purchased for the nation, as well as the two tenements.

Was William Shakspere, then, born in the house in Henley Street which has been purchased by the nation? For ourselves, we frankly confess that the want of absolute certainty that Shakspere was there born, produces a state of mind that is something higher and pleasanter than the conviction that depends upon positive evidence. We are content to follow the popular faith undoubtingly.



[John Shakspere's House in Henley Street.]

The traditionary belief is sanctioned by long usage and universal acceptation The merely curious look in reverent silence upon that mean room, with its massive joists and plastered walls, firm with ribs of oak, where they are told the poet of the human race was born. Eyes now closed on the world but who have left that behind which the world "will not willingly let die, "have glistened under this humble roof, and there have been thoughts unutterable—solemn, confiding, grateful, humble—clustering round their hearts in that hour. The autographs of Byron and Scott are amongst hundreds of perishable inscriptions. Disturb not the belief that William Shakspere first saw the light in this venerated room. *

> "The victor Time has stood on Avon's side
> To doom the fall of many a home of pride:
> Rapine o'er Evesham's gilded fane has strode,
> And gorgeous Kenilworth has paved the road:
> But Time has gently laid his withering hands
> On one frail House—the House of Shakspere stands;
> Centuries are gone—fallen 'the cloud-capp'd tow'rs;'
> But Shakspere's home, his boyhood's home, is ours!"
>
> *Prologue for the Shakspere Night, Dec.* 7, 1847, *by C. Knight.*

* We shall postpone, until nearly the close of this volume, a description, not only of the most recent condition of the premises in Henley Street, but of the garden of New Place, which has also been acquired by public subscription. (See Book II. chapter 10.)

[Inner Court of the Grammar School.]

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHOOL.

THE poet in his well-known 'Seven Ages' has necessarily presented to us only the great boundary-marks of a human life: the progress from one stage to another he has left to be imagined:—

> "At first the infant
> Muling and puking in the nurse's arms."

Perhaps the most influential, though the least observed, part of man's existence, that in which he learns most of good or of evil, lies in the progress between this first act and the second:—

> "And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
> And shining morning face, creeping like snail
> Unwillingly to school."

Between the "nurse's arms" and the "school" there is an important interval,

filled up by a mother's education. Let us see what the home instruction of the young Shakspere would probably have been.

There is a passage in one of Shakspere's Sonnets, the 89th, which has induced a belief that he had the misfortune of a physical defect, which would render him peculiarly the object of maternal solicitude :—

> "Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
> And I will comment upon that offence :
> Speak of my *lameness*, and I straight will halt;
> Against thy reasons making no defence."

Again in the 37th Sonnet :—

> "As a decrepit father takes delight
> To see his active child do deeds of youth,
> So I, made *lame* by fortune's dearest spite,
> Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth."

These lines have been interpreted to mean that William Shakspere was literally lame,* and that his lameness was such as to limit him, when he became an actor, to the representation of the parts of old men. We should, on the contrary, have no doubt whatever that the verses we have quoted may be most fitly received in a metaphorical sense, were there not some subsequent lines in the 37th Sonnet which really appear to have a literal meaning; and thus to render the previous *lame* and *lameness* expressive of something more than the general self-abasement which they would otherwise appear to imply. In the following lines *lame* means something distinct from *poor* and *despised* :—

> "For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
> Or any of these all, or all, or more,
> Entitled in thy parts do crowned sit,
> I make my love engrafted to this store :
> So then I am not *lame*, poor, nor despis'd,
> Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give."

Of one thing, however, we may be quite sure—that, if Shakspere were lame, his infirmity was not such as to disqualify him for active bodily exertion. The same series of verses that have suggested this belief that he was lame also show that he was a horseman.† His entire works exhibit that familiarity with external nature, with rural occupations, with athletic sports, which is incompatible with an inactive boyhood. It is not impossible that some natural defect, or some accidental injury, may have modified the energy of such a child; and have che-

* "Malone has most inefficiently attempted to explain away the *palpable* meaning of the above lines; and adds, 'If Shakspeare was in truth lame, he had it not in his power to *halt occasionally* for this or any other purpose. The defect must have been fixed and permanent.' Not so. Surely many an infirmity of the kind may be skilfully concealed; or only become visible in the moments of hurried movement. Either Sir Walter Scott or Lord Byron might, without any impropriety, have written the verses in question. They would have been applicable to either of them. Indeed the lameness of Lord Byron was exactly such as Shakspeare's might have been; and I remember, as a boy, that he selected those speeches for declamation which would not constrain him to the use of such exertions as might obtrude the defect of his person into notice."—Life of William Shakspeare, by the Rev. William Harness, M.A.

† See Sonnets 50 and 51.

rished in him that love of books, and traditionary lore, and silent contemplation, without which his intellect could not have been nourished into its wondrous strength. But we cannot imagine William Shakspere a petted child, chained to home, not breathing the free air upon his native hills, denied the boy's privilege to explore every nook of his own river. We would imagine him communing from the first with Nature, as Gray has painted him—

"The *dauntless* child
Stretch'd forth his little arms and smil'd."

The only qualifications necessary for the admission of a boy into the Free Grammar School of Stratford were, that he should be a resident in the town, of seven years of age, and able to read. The Grammar School, as we shall presently have to show in detail, was essentially connected with the Corporation of Stratford; and it is impossible to imagine that, when the son of John Shakspere became qualified by age for admission to a school where the best education of the time was given, literally for nothing, his father, in that year, being chief alderman, should not have sent him to the school. We assume, without any hesitation, that William Shakspere did receive in every just sense of the word the education of a scholar; and as such education was to be had at his own door, we also assume that he was brought up at the Free Grammar School of his own town. His earlier instruction would therefore be a preparation for this school, and the probability is that such instruction was given him at home. The letters have been taught, syllables have grown into words, and words into short sentences. There is something to be committed to memory:—

"That is question now;
And then comes answer like an Absey-book." *

In the first year of Edward VI. was published by authority 'The A B C, with the Pater-noster, Ave, Crede, and Ten Commandementtes in Englysshe, newly translated and set forth at the kynges most gracious commandement.' But the A B C soon became more immediately connected with systematic instruction in religious belief. The alphabet and a few short lessons were followed by the catechism, so that the book containing the catechism came to be called an A B C book, or Absey-book. Towards the end of Edward's reign was put forth by authority 'A Short Catechisme or playne instruction, conteynynge the sūme of christian learninge,' which all schoolmasters were called upon to teach after the "little catechism" previously set forth. Such books were undoubtedly suppressed in the reign of Mary, but upon the accession of Elizabeth they were again circulated. A question then arises, Did William Shakspere receive his elementary instruction in Christianity from the books sanctioned by the Reformed Church? It has been maintained that his father belonged to the Roman Catholic persuasion. This belief rests upon the following foundation. In the year 1770, Thomas Hart, who then inhabited one of the tenements in Henley Street which had been bequeathed to his family by William Shakspere's granddaughter, employed a bricklayer to new tile the house; and this bricklayer, by

* King John, Act I., Scene I.

name Mosely, found hidden between the rafters and the tiling a manuscript consisting of six leaves stitched together, which he gave to Mr. Peyton, an alderman of Stratford, who sent it to Mr. Malone, through the Rev. Mr. Devonport, vicar of Stratford. This paper, which was first published by Malone in 1790, is printed also in Reed's Shakspeare and in Drake's 'Shakspeare and his Times.' It consists of fourteen articles, purporting to be a confession of faith of "John Shakspear, an unworthy member of the holy Catholic religion." We have no hesitation whatever in believing this document to be altogether a fabrication. Chalmers says, "It was the performance of a clerk, the undoubted work of the family priest."* Malone, when he first published the paper in his edition of Shakspeare, said—"I have taken some pains to ascertain the authenticity of this manuscript, and, after a very careful inquiry, am perfectly satisfied that it is genuine." In 1796, however, in his work on the Ireland forgeries, he asserts—"I have since obtained documents that clearly prove it could not have been the composition of any of our poet's family." We not only do not believe that it was "the composition of any one of our poet's family," nor "the undoubted work of the family priest," but we do not believe that it is the work of a Roman Catholic at all. It professes to be the writer's "last spiritual will, testament, confession, protestation, and confession of faith." Now, if the writer had been a Roman Catholic, or if it had been drawn up for his approval and signature by his priest, it would necessarily, professing such fulness and completeness, have contained something of belief touching the then material points of spiritual difference between the Roman and the Reformed Church. Nothing, however, can be more vague than all this tedious protestation and confession, with the exception that phrases, and indeed long passages, are introduced for the purpose of marking the supposed writer's opinions in the way that should be most offensive to those of a contrary opinion, as if by way of bravado or seeking of persecution. Thus: "Item, I, John Shakspear, do protest that I will also pass out of this life armed with the last sacrament of extreme unction." Again: "Item, I, John Shakspear, do protest that I am willing, yea, I do infinitely desire and humbly crave, that of this my last will and testament the glorious and ever Virgin Mary, mother of God, refuge and advocate of sinners, (whom I honour specially above all saints,) may be the chief executress together with these other saints, my patrons, (Saint Winefride,) all whom I invoke and beseech to be present at the hour of my death, that she and they comfort me with their desired presence." Again: "Item, I, John Shakspear, do in like manner pray and beseech my dear friends, parents, and kinsfolks, by the bowels of our Saviour Jesus Christ, that, since it is uncertain what lot will befall me, for fear notwithstanding lest by reason of my sins I be to pass and stay a long while in purgatory, they will vouchsafe to assist and succour me with their holy prayers and satisfactory works, especially with the holy sacrifice of the mass, as being the most effectual means to deliver souls from their torments and pains; from the which if I shall, by God's gracious goodness, and by their virtuous works, be delivered, I do promise that I will not be ungrateful unto them for so

* Apology for the Believers, page 199.

great a benefit." This last item, which is the twelfth of the paper, is demonstrative to us of its spuriousness. The thirteenth article of this pretended testament runs thus:—"I, John Shakspear, do by this my last will and testament bequeath my soul, as soon as it shall be delivered and loosened from the prison of this my body, to be entombed in the sweet and amorous coffin of the side of Jesus Christ; and that in this life-giving sepulchre it may rest and live, perpetually enclosed in that eternal habitation of repose, there to bless for ever and ever that direful iron of the lance, which, like a charge in a censer, forms so sweet and pleasant a monument within the sacred breast of my Lord and Saviour." This ambitious nonsense is certainly not the language of a plain man like the supposed writer.

That John Shakspere was what we popularly call a Protestant in the year 1568, when his son William was four years old, may be shown by the clearest of proofs. He was in that year the chief magistrate of Stratford; he could not have become so without taking the Oath of Supremacy, according to the statute of the 1st of Elizabeth, 1558-9.* To refuse this oath was made punishable with forfeiture and imprisonment, with the pains of præmunire and high treason. "The conjecture," says Chalmers (speaking in support of the authenticity of this confession of faith), "that Shakspeare's family were Roman Catholics, is strengthened by the fact that his father declined to attend the corporation meetings, and was at last removed from the corporate body." He was removed from the corporate body in 1585, with a distinct statement of the reason for this removal—his non-attendance when summoned to the halls. According to this reasoning of Chalmers, John Shakspere did not hesitate to take the Oath of Supremacy when he was chief magistrate in 1564, but retired from the corporation in 1585, where he might have remained without offence to his own conscience or to others, being, in the language of that day, a Popish recusant, to be stigmatized as such, persecuted, and subject to the most odious restrictions. If he left or was expelled the corporation for his religious opinions, he would, of course, not attend the service of the church, for which offence he would be liable, in 1585, to a fine of 20*l.* per month; and then, to crown the whole, in this his last confession, spiritual will, and testament, he calls upon all his kinsfolks to assist and succour him after his death "with the holy sacrifice of the mass," with a promise that he "will not be ungrateful unto them for so great a benefit," well knowing that by the Act of 1581 the saying of mass was punishable by a year's imprisonment and a fine of 200 marks, and the hearing of it by a similar imprisonment and a fine of 100 marks. The fabrication appears to us as gross as can well be imagined.† But a subsequent discovery of a document in the State Paper Office, communicated by

* "And all and every *temporal judge, mayor, and other lay or temporal officer and minister*, and every other person having your Highness's fee or wages within this realm, or any your Highness's dominions, shall make, take, and receive a corporal oath upon the Evangelist, before such person or persons as shall please your Highness, your heirs or successors, under the great seal of England, to assign and name to accept and take the same, according to the tenor and effect hereafter following, that is to say," &c.

† See Note at the end of this Chapter.

Mr. Lemon to Mr. Collier, shows that in 1592, Mr. John Shakspere, with fourteen of his neighbours, were returned by certain Commissioners as "such recusants as have been heretofore presented for not coming monthly to the church according to her Majesty's laws, and yet are thought to forbear the church for debt and for fear of process, or for some other worse faults, or for age, sickness, or impotency of body." John Shakspere is classed amongst nine who "came not to church for fear of process for debt." We shall have to notice this assigned reason for the recusancy in a future Chapter. But the religious part of the question is capable of another solution, than that the father of Shakspere had become reconciled to the Romish religion. At that period the puritan section of the English church were acquiring great strength in Stratford and the neighbourhood; and in 1596, Richard Bifield, one of the most zealous of the puritan ministers, became its Vicar.* John Shakspere and his neighbours might not have been Popish recusants, and yet have avoided the church. It must be borne in mind that the parents of William Shakspere passed through the great changes of religious opinion, as the greater portion of the people passed, without any violent corresponding change in their habits derived from their forefathers. In the time of Henry VIII. the great contest of opinion was confined to the supremacy of the Pope; the great practical state measure was the suppression of the religious houses. Under Edward VI. there was a very careful compromise of all those opinions and practices in which the laity were participant. In the short reign of Mary the persecution of the Reformers must have been offensive even to those who clung fastest to the ancient institutions and modes of belief; and even when the Reformation was fully established under Elizabeth, the habits of the people were still very slightly interfered with. The astounding majority of the conforming clergy is a convincing proof how little the opinions of the laity must have been disturbed. They would naturally go along with their old teachers. We have to imagine, then, that the father of William Shakspere, and his mother, were, at the time of his birth, of the religion established by law. His father, by holding a high municipal office after the accession of Elizabeth, had solemnly declared his adherence to the great principle of Protestantism—the acknowledgment of the civil sovereign as head of the church. The speculative opinions in which the child was brought up would naturally shape themselves to the creed which his father must have professed in his capacity of magistrate; but, according to some opinions, this profession was a disguise on the part of his father. The young Shakspere was brought up in the Roman persuasion, according to these notions, because he intimates an acquaintance with the practices of the Roman church, and mentions purgatory, shrift, confession, in his dramas.† Surely the poet might exhibit this familiarity with the ancient language of all Christendom, without thus speaking "from the overflow of Roman Catholic zeal."‡ Was it "Roman Catholic zeal" which induced him to write those strong lines in King John against the "Italian Priest," and against those who

* Hunter: 'New Illustrations,' vol. i. p. 106. † See Chalmers's 'Apology,' p. 290.

‡ Chalmers. See also Drake, who adopts, in great measure, Chalmers's argument.

"Purchase corrupted pardon of a man"?

Was it "Roman Catholic zeal" which made him introduce these words into the famous prophecy of the glory and happiness of the reign of Elizabeth—

"God shall be truly known"?

He was brought up, without doubt, in the opinions which his father publicly professed, in holding office subject to his most solemn affirmation of those opinions. The distinctions between the Protestant and the Popish recusant were then not so numerous or speculative as they afterwards became. But, such as they were, we may be sure that William Shakspere learnt his catechism from his mother in all sincerity; that he frequented the church in which he and his brothers and sisters were baptized; that he was prepared for the discipline of the school in which religious instruction by a minister of the church was regularly afforded as the end of the other knowledge there taught. He became tolerant, according to the manifestation of his after-writings, through nature and the habits and friendships of his early life. But that tolerance does not presume insincerity in himself or his family. The 'Confession of Faith' found in the roof of his father's house two hundred years after he was born would argue the extreme of religious zeal, even to the defiance of all law and authority, on the part of a man who had by the acceptance of office professed his adherence to the established national faith. If that paper were to be believed, we must be driven to the conclusion that John Shakspere was an unconscientious hypocrite for one part of his life, and a furious bigot for the other part. It is much easier to believe that the Reformation fell lightly upon John Shakspere, as it did upon the bulk of the laity; and he and his wife, without any offence to their consciences, saw the Common Prayer take the place of the Mass-book, and acknowledged the temporal sovereign to be head of the church; that in the education of their children they dispensed with auricular confession and penance; but that they, in common with their neighbours, tolerated, and perhaps delighted in, many of the festivals and imaginative forms of the old religion, and even looked up for heavenly aid through intercession, without fancying that they were yielding to an idolatrous superstition, such as Puritanism came subsequently to denounce. The transition from the old worship to the new was not an ungentle one for the laity. The early reformers were too wise to attempt to root up habits—those deep-sunk foundations of the past which break the ploughshares of legislation when it strives to work an inch below the earth's surface.

Pass we on to matters more congenial to the universality of William Shakspere's mind than the controversies of doctrine, or the mutual persecutions of rival sects. He escaped their pernicious influences. He speaks always with reverence of the teachers of the highest wisdom, by whatever name denominated. He has learnt, then, at his mother's knee the cardinal doctrines of Christianity; he can read. His was an age of few books. Yet, believing, as we do, that his father and mother were well-educated persons, there would be volumes in their house capable of exciting the interest of an inquiring boy—volumes now rarely seen and very precious. Some of the first books of the

English press might be there; but the changes of language in the ninety years that had passed since the introduction of printing into England would almost seal them against a boy's perusal. Caxton's books were essentially of a popular character; but, as he himself complained, the language of his time was greatly unsettled, showing that "we Englishmen ben born under the domination of the moon, which is never steadfast."* Caxton's Catalogue was rich in romantic and poetical lore—the 'Confessio Amantis,' the 'Canterbury Tales,' 'Troilus and Creseide,' the 'Book of Troy,' the 'Dictes of the Philosophers,' the 'Mirror of the World,' the 'Siege of Jerusalem,' the 'Book of Chivalry,' the 'Life of King Arthur.' Here were legends of faith and love, of knightly deeds and painful perils—glimpses of history through the wildest romance—enough to fill the mind of a boy-poet with visions of unutterable loveliness and splendour. The famous successors of the first printer followed in the same career—they adapted their works to the great body of purchasers; they left the learned to their manuscripts. What a present must "Dame Julyana Bernes" have bestowed upon her countrymen in her book of Hunting, printed by Wynkyn de Worde, with other books of sports! Master Skelton, laureate, would rejoice the hearts of the most orthodox, by his sly hits at the luxury and domination of the priesthood: Robert Copland, who translated "Kynge Appolyne of Thyre,' sent perhaps the story of that prince's "malfortunes and perilous adventures" into a soil in which they were to grow into a 'Pericles:' and Stephen Hawes, in his 'Pass Tyme of Pleasure,' he being "one of the grooms of the most honourable chamber of our sovereign lord King Henry the Seventh," would deserve the especial favour of the descendant of Robert Arden. Subsequently came the English 'Froissart' of Lord Berners, and other great books hereafter to be mentioned. But if these, and such as these, were not to be read by the child undisciplined by school, there were pictures in some of those old books which of themselves would open a world to him. That wondrous book of 'Bartholomæus de Proprietatibus Rerum,' describing, and exhibiting in appropriate wood-cuts, every animate and inanimate thing, and even the most complex operations of social life, whether of cooking, ablution, or the ancient and appropriate use of the comb for the destruction of beasts of prey—the child Shakspere would have turned over its leaves with delight. 'The Chronicle of England, with the Fruit of Times,'—the edition of 1527, with cuts innumerable,—how must it have taken that boy into the days of "fierce wars," and have shown him the mailed knights, the archers, and the billmen that fought at Poitiers for a vain empery, and afterwards turned their swords and their arrows against each other at Barnet and Tewkesbury?—What dim thoughts of earthly mutations, unknown to the quiet town of Stratford, must the young Shakspere have received, as he looked upon the pictures of "the boke of John Bochas, describing the fall of princes, princesses, and other nobles," and especially as he beheld the portrait of John Lydgate, the translator, kneeling in a long black cloak, admiring the vicissitude of the wheel of fortune, the divinity being represented by a male figure, in a robe, with expanded wings! Rude and incongruous works of art, ye were yet an intelligible

* Boke of Eneydos.

language to the young and the uninstructed ; and the things ye taught through the visual sense were not readily to be forgotten !

But there were books in those days, simple and touching in their diction, and sounding alike the depths of the hearts of childhood and of age, which were the printed embodiments of that traditionary lore that the shepherd repeated in his loneliness when pasturing his flocks in the uplands, and the maiden recited to her companions at the wheel. Were there not in every house 'Christmas Carols,'—perhaps not the edition of Wynkyn de Worde in 1521, but reprints out of number? Did not the same great printer scatter about merry England—and especially dear were such legends to the people of the midland and northern counties—"A lytell Geste of Robyn Hode?" Whose ear amongst the yeomen of Warwickshire did not listen when some genial spirit would recite out that of "lytell Geste?"—

> "Lythe and lysten, gentylmen,
> That be of fre bore blode,
> I shall you tell of a good yeman,
> His name was Robyn Hode;
> Robyn was a proud outlawe
> Whyles he walked on ground,
> So curteyse an outlawe as he was one
> Was never none y founde."

The good old printer, Wynkyn, knew that there were real, because spiritual, truths in these ancient songs and gestes; and his press poured them out in company with many "A full devoute and gosteley Treatise." That charming, and yet withal irreverend, "mery geste of the frere and the boy,"—what genial mirth was there in seeing the child, ill-used by his step-mother, making a whole village dance to his magic pipe, even to the reverendicity of the frere leaping in profane guise as the little boy commanded, so that when he ceased piping he could make the frere and the hard step-mother obedient to his innocent will! There was beautiful wisdom in these old tales—something that seemed to grow instinctively out of the bosom of nature, as the wild blossoms and the fruit of a rich intellectual soil, uncultivated, but not sterile. Of the romances of chivalry might be read, in the fair types of Richard Pynson, 'Sir Bevis of Southampton;' and in those of Robert Copland, 'Arthur of lytell Brytayne;' and 'Sir Degore, a Romance,' printed by William Copland; also 'Sir Isenbrace,' and 'The Knighte of the Swanne,' a "miraculous history," from the same press. Nor was the dramatic form of poetry altogether wanting in those days of William Shakspere's childhood—verse, not essentially dramatic in the choice of subject, but dialogue, which may sometimes pass for dramatic even now. There was 'A new Interlude and a mery of the nature of the i i i i elements;' and 'Magnyfycence; a goodly interlude and mery;' and an interlude "wherein is shewd and described as well the bewte of good propertes of women as theyr vyces and cuyll condicions;" and 'An interlude entitled Jack Juggeler and mistress Boundgrace;' and, most attractive of all, 'A newe playe for to be played in Maye games, very plesaunte and full of pastyme,' on the subject of Robin Hood and the Friar. The merry interludes of the inde-

fatigable John Heywood were preserved in print, in the middle of the sixteenth century, whilst many a noble play that was produced fifty years afterwards has perished with its actors. To repeat passages out of these homely dialogues, in which, however homely they were, much solid knowledge was in some sort conveyed, would be a sport for childhood. Out of books, too, and single printed sheets, might the songs that gladdened the hearts of the English yeoman, and solaced the dreary winter hours of the esquire in his hall, be readily learnt. What countryman, at fair, or market, could resist the attractive titles of the "balletts" printed by the good widow Toy, of London—a munificent widow, who presented the Stationers' Company, in 1560, with a new table-cloth and a dozen of napkins—titles that have melody even to us who have lost the pleasant words they ushered in? There are,—

"Who lyve so mery and make suche sporte
As they that be of the poorer sorte?"

and,

"God send me a wyfe that will do as I say;"

and, very charming in the rhythm of its one known line,

"The rose is from my garden gone."

Songs of sailors were there also in those days—England's proper songs—such as 'Hold the anchor fast.' There were collections of songs, too, as those of "Thomas Whithorne, gentleman, for three, four, or five voices," which found their way into every yeoman's house when we were a musical people, and could sing in parts. It was the wise policy of the early Reformers, when chantries had for the most part been suppressed, to direct the musical taste of the laity to the performance of the church service; * and many were the books adapted to this end, such as 'Bassus,' consisting of portions of the service to be chanted, and 'The whole Psalms, in four parts, which may be sung to all musical instruments' (1563). The metrical version of the Psalms, by Sternhold and Hopkins, first printed in 1562, was essentially for the people; and, accustomed as we have been to smile at the occasional want of refinement in this translation, its manly vigour, ay, and its bold harmony, may put to shame many of the feebler productions of later times. Sure we are that the child William Shakspere had his memory stored with its vigorous and idiomatic English.

But there was one book which it was the especial happiness of that contemplative boy to be familiar with. When in the year 1537 the Bible in English was first printed by authority, Richard Grafton, the printer, sent six copies to Cranmer, beseeching the archbishop to accept them as his simple gift, adding, "For your lordship, moving our most gracious prince to the allowance and licensing of such a work, hath wrought such an act worthy of praise as never

* One of the pleasantest characteristics of the present day is the revival of a love for and a knowledge of music amongst the people. Twenty years ago the birthplace of Shakspere presented a worthy example to England. The beautiful church in which our great poet is buried had been recently repaired and newly fitted up with rare propriety; and, most appropriately in this fine old collegiate church and chantry, the choir of young persons of both sexes, voluntarily formed from amongst the respectable inhabitants, was equal to the performance in the most careful style of the choral parts of the service, and of those anthems whose highest excellence is their solemn harmony rather than the display of individual voices.

was mentioned in any chronicle in this realm." From that time, with the exception of the short interval of the reign of Mary, the presses of London were for the most part employed in printing Bibles. That book, to whose wonderful heart-stirring narratives the child listens with awe and love, was now and ever after to be the solace of the English home. With "the Great Bible" open before her, the mother would read aloud to her little ones that beautiful story of Joseph sold into slavery, and then advanced to honour—and how his brethren knew him not when, suppressing his tears, he said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake?"—or, how, when the child Samuel was laid down to sleep, the Lord called to him three times, and he grew, and God was with him;—or, how the three holy men who would not worship the golden image walked about in the midst of the burning fiery furnace;—or, how the prophet that was unjustly cast into the den of lions was found unhurt, because the true God had sent his angels and shut the lions' mouths. These were the solemn and affecting narratives, wonderfully preserved for our instruction from a long antiquity, that in the middle of the sixteenth century became unclosed to the people of England. But more especially was that other Testament opened which most imported them to know; and thus, when the child repeated in lisping accents the Christian's prayer to his Father in heaven, the mother could expound to him that, when the Divine Author of that prayer first gave it to us, He taught us that the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, were the happy and the beloved of God; and laid down that comprehensive law of justice, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We believe that the home education of William Shakspere was grounded upon this Book; and that, if this Book had been sealed to his childhood, he might have been the poet of nature, of passion,—his humour might have been as rich as we find it, and his wit as pointed,—but that he would not have been the poet of the most profound as well as the most tolerant philosophy; his insight into the nature of man, his meanness and his grandeur, his weakness and his strength, would not have been what it is.

As the boy advanced towards the age of seven a little preparation for the grammar-school would be desirable. There would be choice of elementary books. The 'Alphabetum Latino Anglicum,' issued under the special authority of Henry VIII., might attract by its most royal and considerate assurance that "we forget not the tender babes and the youth of our realm." Learning, however, was not slow then to put on its solemn aspects to the "tender babes;" and so we have some grammars with a wooden cut of an awful man sitting on a high chair, pointing to a book with his right hand, but with a mighty rod in his left. On the other hand, the excellent Grammar of William Lilly would open a pleasant prospect of delight and recreation, in its well-known picture of a huge fruit-bearing tree, with little boys mounted amongst its branches and gathering in the bounteous crop—a vision not however to be interpreted too literally. Lilly's Grammar, we are assured by certain grave reasoners, was the Grammar used by Shakspere, because he quotes a line from that Grammar which is a modi-

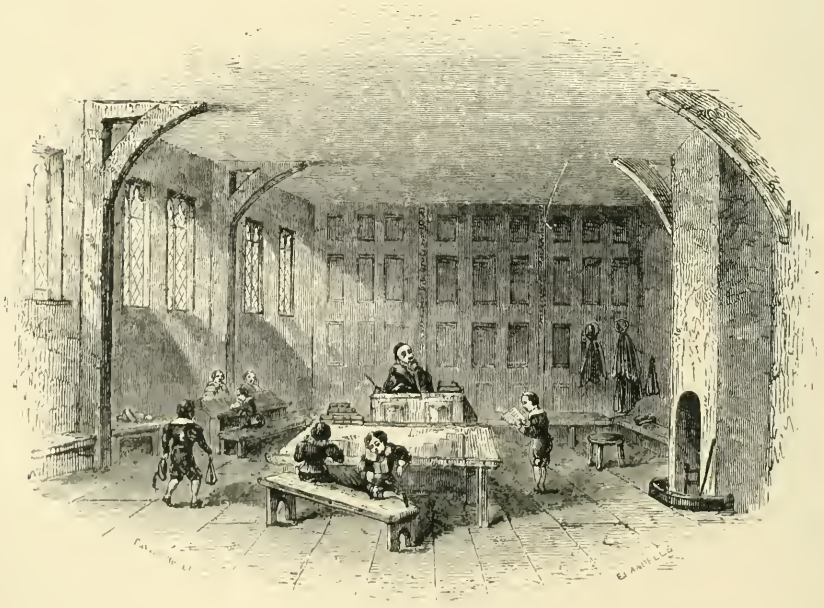
fication of a line in Terence. Be it so, as far as the Grammar goes. The memory of his school-lessons might have been stronger than that of his later acquirements. He might have quoted Lilly, and yet have read Terence. This, however, is not the place for the opening of the *quæstio vexata* of Shakspere's learning. To the grammar-school, then, with some preparation, we hold that William Shakspere goes, in the year 1571. His father is at this time, as we have said, chief alderman of his town; he is a gentleman, now, of repute and authority; he is Master John Shakspere; and assuredly the worthy curate of the neighbouring village of Luddington, Thomas Hunt, who was also the schoolmaster, would have received his new scholar with some kindness. As his "shining morning face" first passed out of the main street into that old court through which the upper room of learning was to be reached, a new life would be opening upon him. The humble minister of religion who was his first instructor has left no memorials of his talents or his acquirements; and in a few years another master came after him, Thomas Jenkins, also unknown to fame. All praise and honour be to them; for it is impossible to imagine that the teachers of William Shakspere were evil instructors—giving the boy husks instead of wholesome aliment. They could not have been harsh and perverse instructors, for such spoil the gentlest natures, and his was always gentle:—"My gentle Shakspere" is he called by a rough but noble spirit—one in whom was all honesty and genial friendship under a rude exterior. His wondrous abilities could not be spoiled even by ignorant instructors.

In the seventh year of the reign of Edward VI. a royal charter was granted to Stratford for the incorporation of the inhabitants. That charter recites—"That the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon was an ancient borough, in which a certain guild was theretofore founded, and endowed with divers lands, tenements, and possessions, out of the rents, revenues, and profits whereof a certain free grammar-school for the education of boys there was made and supported."* The charter further recites the other public objects to which the property of the guild had been applied;—that it was dissolved; and that its possessions had come into the hands of the king. The charter of incorporation then grants to the bailiff and burgesses certain properties which were parcel of the possessions of the guild, for the general charges of the borough, for the maintenance of an ancient almshouse, "and that the free grammar-school for the instruction and education of boys and youth there should be thereafter kept up and maintained as theretofore it used to be." It may be doubted whether Stratford was benefited by the dissolution of its guild. We see that its grammar-school was an ancient establishment: it was not a creation of the charter of Edward VI., although it is popularly called one of the grammar-schools of that king, and was the last school established by him.† The people of Stratford had possessed the advantage of a school for instruction in Greek and Latin, which is the distinct object of a grammar-school, from the time of Edward IV., when Thomas Jolyffe, in 1482, "granted to the guild of the Holy Cross of Stratford-upon-Avon

* Report of the Commissioners for inquiring concerning Charities. † See Strype's 'Memorials.'

all his lands and tenements in Stratford and Dodwell, in the county of Warwick, upon condition that the master, aldermen, and proctors of the said guild should find a priest, fit and able in knowledge, to teach grammar freely to all scholars coming to the school in the said town to him, taking nothing of the scholars for their teaching."* Dugdale describes the origin of guilds, speaking of this of Stratford:—"Such meetings were at first used by a mutual agreement of friends and neighbours, and particular licenses granted to them for conferring lands or rents to defray their public charges in respect that, by the statute of mortmain, such gifts would otherwise have been forfeited."

In the surveys of Henry VIII., previous to the dissolution of religious houses, there were four salaried priests belonging to the guild of Stratford, with a clerk, who was also schoolmaster, at a salary of ten pounds per annum.† They were a hospitable body these guild-folk, for there was an annual feast, to which all the fraternity resorted, with their tenants and farmers; and an inventory of their goods in the 15th of Edward IV. shows that they were rich in plate for the service of the table, as well as of the chapel. That chapel was partly rebuilt by the great benefactor of Stratford, Sir Hugh Clopton; and after the dissolution of the guild, and the establishment of the grammar-school by the charter of Edward VI., the school was in all probability kept within it. There is an entry in the Corporation books, of February 18, 1594-5—"At this hall it was agreed by the bailiff and the greater number of the company now present that there shall be no school kept in the chapel from this time following." In associating, therefore, the schoolboy days of William Shakspere with the Free



[Interior of the Grammar School.]

* Report of Commissioners, &c.

† Dugdale.

Grammar-School of Stratford, we cannot with any certainty imagine him engaged in his daily tasks in the ancient room which is now the school-room. And yet the use of the chapel as a school, discontinued in 1595, might only have been a temporary use. A little space may be occupied in a notice of each building.

The grammar-school is now an ancient room over the old town-hall of Stratford;—both, no doubt, offices of the ancient guild. We enter from the street into a court, of which one side is formed by the chapel of the Holy Cross. Opposite the chapel is a staircase, ascending which we are in a plain room, with a ceiling. But it is evident that this work of plaster is modern, and that above it we have the oak roof of the sixteenth century. In this room are a few forms and a rude antique desk.

The Chapel of the Guild is in great part a very perfect specimen of the plainer ecclesiastical architecture of the reign of Henry VII.:—a building of just proportions and some ornament, but not running into elaborate decoration. The engraving below exhibits its street-front, showing the grammar school beyond.

[Chapel of the Guild, and Grammar School; Street Front.]

The interior now presents nothing very remarkable. But upon a general repair of the Chapel in 1804, beneath the whitewash of successive generations was discovered a series of most remarkable paintings, some in that portion of the building erected by Sir Hugh Clopton, and others in the far more ancient Chancel. A very elaborate series of coloured engravings has been published from these paintings, from drawings made at the time of their discovery by

Mr. Thomas Fisher. There can be little doubt, from the defacement of some of the paintings, that they were partially destroyed by violence, and all attempted to be obliterated in the progress of the Reformation. But that outbreak of zeal did not belong to the first periods of religious change; and it is most probable that these paintings were existing in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. When the five priests of the guild were driven from their home and their means of maintenance, the chapel no doubt ceased to be a place of worship; and it probably became the school-room, after the foundation of the grammar-school, distinct from the guild, under the charter of Edward VI. If it was the school-room of William Shakspere, those rude paintings must have produced a powerful effect upon his imagination. Many of them in the ancient Chancel constituted a pictorial romance—the history of the Holy Cross, from its origin as a tree at the Creation of the World to its rescue from the Pagan Cosdroy, King of Persia, by the Christian King, Heraclius;—and its final Exaltation at Jerusalem,—the anniversary of which event was celebrated at Stratford at its annual fair, held on the 14th of September. There were other pictures of Saints, and Martyrdoms, and one, especially, of the murder of Thomas à Becket, which exhibits great force, without that grotesqueness which generally belongs to our early paintings.

[The Martyrdom of Thomas à Becket: from an ancient Painting in the Chapel of the Holy Cross.]

There were fearful pictures, too, of the last Judgment; with the Seven Deadly Sins visibly portrayed,—the punishments of the evil, the rewards of the just. Surrounded as he was with the memorials of the old religion—with great changes on every side, but still very recent changes—how impossible was it that Shakspere should not have been thoroughly imbued with a knowledge of all that pertained to the faith of his ancestors! One of the most philosophical writers of our day has said that Catholicism gave us Shakspere.* Not so, entirely. Shakspere belonged to the transition period, or he could not have been quite what he was. His intellect was not the dwarfish and precocious growth of the hot-bed of change, and still less of convulsion. His whole soul was permeated with the ancient vitalities—the things which the changes of institutions could not touch; but it could bourgeon under the new influences, and blend the past and the present, as the "giant oak" of five hundred winters is covered with the foliage of one spring.†

* Carlyle—'French Revolution.

† The foundation scholars of this grammar-school at present receive a complete classical education, so as to fit them for the university.—(Report of Commissioners.)

NOTE ON JOHN SHAKSPERE'S CONFESSION OF FAITH.

The thirteenth item of this strange production appears to us, in common with many other passages, to be conceived in that spirit of exaggeration which would mark the work of an imitator of the language of the sixteenth century, rather than the production of one habitually employing it:—"Item, I, John Shakspear, do by this my last will and testament bequeath my soul, as soon as it shall be delivered and loosened from the prison of this my body, to be entombed in the *sweet and amorous* coffin of the side of Jesus Christ; and that in this *life-giving sepulchre* it may rest and live, perpetually enclosed in that eternal habitation of repose, there to bless for ever and ever that *direful iron of the lance*, which, *like a charge in a censer*, forms so sweet and pleasant a monument within the sacred breast of my Lord and Saviour." Surely this is not the language of a plain man in earnest. Who then, can it be imagined, would fabricate this production in 1770? Mosely the bricklayer finds it in the roof of the house in which Shakspere was held to be born; and to whom, according to the story, does he give it? Not to the descendant of John Shakspere, the then owner of the house, but to Alderman Peyton, who transmits it to Malone through the Vicar of Stratford. Garrick's Jubilee took place in 1769; but the farces enacted on that occasion were not likely to set people searching after antiquities or fabricating them. But previous to the publication of his edition of Shakspere, in 1790, Malone visited Stratford to examine the Registers and other documents. He appears to have done exactly what he pleased on this occasion. He carried off the Registers and the Corporation Records with him to London; and he whitewashed the bust of Shakspere, so as utterly to destroy its value as a memorial of costume. There was then a cunning fellow in the town by name Jordan, who thought the commentator a fair mark for his ingenuity. He produced to him a drawing of Shakspere's house, New Place, copied, as he said, from an ancient document, which Malone engraved as "From a Drawing in the Margin of an Ancient Survey, made by order of Sir George Carew, and found at Clopton, near Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1786." When the elder Ireland visited Stratford in 1795 the original drawing was "lost or destroyed." The same edition of Shakspere in which this drawing "found at Clopton" is first presented to the world also first gives the Confession of Faith of John Shakspere, found in the roof of his house in Henley Street. We doubt exceedingly whether Jordan fabricated the one or the other: but there was a man who was quite capable of prompting both impositions, and of carrying them through; one upon whom the suspicion of fabricating Shaksperian documents strongly rested in his lifetime; one who would have rejoiced with the most malignant satisfaction in hoaxing a rival editor. We need not name him. It is evident to us that Malone subsequently discovered that he had been imposed upon: for in his posthumous 'Life of Shakspeare' he has not one word of allusion to this Confession of Faith; he not only omits to print it, but he suppresses all notice of it. He would sink it for ever in the sea of oblivion. In 1790 he produced it triumphantly with the conviction that it was genuine; in 1796 he had obtained documents to prove it could not have been the composition of any one of the poet's family; but in the posthumous edition of 1821 the documents of explanation, as well as the Confession of Faith itself, are treated as if they never had been.

[Village of Aston Cantlow.]

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOLBOY'S WORLD.

LET us pass over for a time the young Shakspere at his school-desk, inquiring not when he went from 'The Short Dictionary' forward to the use of 'Cooper's Lexicon,' or whether he was most drilled in the 'Eclogues' of Virgil, or those of the "good old Mantuan." Of one thing we may be well assured,—that the instruction of the grammar-school was the right instruction for the most vivacious mind, as for him of slower capacity. To spend a considerable portion of the years of boyhood in the acquirement of Latin and Greek was not to waste them, as modern illumination would instruct us. Something was to be acquired, accurately and completely, that was of universal application, and within the boy's power of acquirement. The particular knowledge that would fit him for a chosen course of life would be an after acquirement; and, having attained the habit of patient study, and established in his own mind a standard to apply to all branches of knowledge by knowing one branch well, he would enter upon the race of life without being over-weighted with the elements of many arts and sciences, which it belongs only to the mature intellect to bear easily and grace-

fully, and to employ to lasting profit. Our grammar-schools were wise institutions. They opened the road to usefulness and honour to the humblest in the land; they bestowed upon the son of the peasant the same advantages of education as the son of the noble could receive from the most accomplished teacher in his father's halls. Long may they be preserved amongst us in their integrity; not converted by the meddlings of innovation into lecture-rooms for cramming children with the nomenclature of every science; presenting little idea even of the physical world beyond that of its being a vast aggregation of objects that may be classified and catalogued; and leaving the spiritual world utterly uncared for, as a region whose products cannot be readily estimated by a money value!

Every schoolboy's dwelling-place is a microcosm; but the little world lying around William Shakspere was something larger than that in which boys of our own time for the most part live. The division of employments had not so completely separated a town life from a country life as with us; and even the town occupations, the town amusements, and the town wonders, had more variety in them than our own days of systematic arrangement can present. Much of the education of William Shakspere was unquestionably in the fields. A thousand incidental allusions manifest his familiarity with all the external aspects of nature. He is very rarely a descriptive poet, distinctively so called; but images of mead and grove, of dale and upland, of forest depths, of quiet walks by gentle rivers,—reflections of his own native scenery,—spread themselves without an effort over all his writings. All the occupations of a rural life are glanced at or embodied in his characters. The sports, the festivals, of the lone farm or the secluded hamlet are presented by him with all the charms of an Arcadian age, but with a truthfulness that is not found in Arcadia. The nicest peculiarities in the habits of the lower creation are given at a touch; we see the rook wing his evening flight to the wood; we hear the drowsy hum of the sharded beetle. He wreathes all the flowers of the field in his delicate chaplets; and even the nicest mysteries of the gardener's art can be expounded by him. All this he appears to do as if from an instinctive power. His poetry in this, as in all other great essentials, is like the operations of nature itself; we see not its workings. But we may be assured, from the very circumstance of its appearing so accidental, so spontaneous in its relations to all external nature and to the country life, that it had its foundation in very early and very accurate observation. Stratford was especially fitted to have been the "green lap" in which the boy-poet was "laid." The whole face of creation here wore an aspect of quiet loveliness. Looking on its placid stream, its gently swelling hills, its rich pastures, its sleeping woodlands, the external world would to him be full of images of repose: it was in the heart of man that he was to seek for the sublime. Nature has thus ever with him something genial and exhilarating. There are storms in his great dramas, but they are the accompaniments of the more terrible storms of human passions: they are raised by the poet's art to make the agony of Lear more intense, and the murder of Duncan more awful. But his love of a smiling creation seems ever present. We must image Stratford as it was, to see how the young Shakspere walked "in glory and in joy" amongst his native fields. Upon

the bank of the Avon, having a very slight rise, is placed a scattered town ; a town whose dwellings have orchards and gardens, with lofty trees growing in its pathways. Its splendid collegiate church, in the time of Henry VIII., was described to lie half a mile from the town. Its eastern window is reflected in the river which flows beneath ; its grey tower is embowered amidst lofty elm-rows At the opposite end of the town is a fine old bridge, with a causeway whose "wearisome but needful length" tells of inundations in the low pastures that lie all around it. We look upon Dugdale's Map of Barlchway Hundred, in which Stratford is situated, published in 1656, and we see four roads issuing from the town. The one to Henley in Arden, which lies through the street in which Shakspere may be supposed to have passed his boyhood, continues over a valley of some breadth and extent, unenclosed fields undoubtedly in the sixteenth century, with the hamlets of Shottery and Bishopton amidst them. The road leads into the then woody district of Arden. At a short distance from it is the hamlet of Wilmecote, where Mary Arden dwelt ; and some two miles aside, more in the heart of the woodland district, and hard by the river Alne, is the village of Aston Cantlow. Another road indicated on this old map is that to Warwick. The wooded hills of Welcombe overhang it, and a little aside, some mile and a half from Stratford, is the meadow of Ingon which John Shakspere rented in 1570. Very beautiful, even now, is this part of the neighbourhood, with its rapid undulations, little dells which shut in the scattered sheep, and sudden hills opening upon a wide landscape. Ancient crab-trees and hawthorns tell of uncultivated downs which have rung to the call of the falconer or the horn of the huntsman ; and then, having crossed the ridge, we are amongst rich corn-lands, with farm-houses of no modern date scattered about ; and deep in the hollow, so as to be hidden till we are upon it, the old village of Snitterfield, with its ancient church and its yew-tree as ancient. Here the poet's maternal grandmother had her jointure ; and here it has been conjectured his father also had possessions. On the opposite side of Stratford the third road runs in the direction of the Avon to the village of Bidford, with a nearer pathway along the river-bank. We cross the ancient bridge by the fourth road (which also diverges to Shipston), and we are on our way to the celebrated house and estate of Charlcote, the ancient seat of the Lucys, the Shaksperian locality with which most persons are familiar through traditions of deer-stealing, of which we have not yet to speak. A pleasant ramble indeed is this to Charlcote and Hampton Lucy, even with glimpses of the Avon from a turnpike-road. But let the road run through meadows without hedgerows, with pathways following the river's bank, now diverging when the mill is close upon the stream, now crossing a leafy elevation, and then suddenly dropping under a precipitous wooded rock, and we have a walk such as poet might covet, and such as Shakspere did enjoy in his boy rambles.

Through these pleasant places would the boy William Shakspere walk hand in hand with his father, or wander at his own free will with his school companions. All the simple processes of farming life would be familiar to him. The profitable mysteries of modern agriculture would not embarrass his youthful experience. He would witness none of that anxious diligence which compels the

earth to yield double crops, and places little reliance upon the unassisted operations of nature. The seed-time and the harvest in the corn-fields, the gathering-in of the thin grass on the uplands, and of the ranker produce of the flooded meadows, the folding of the flocks on the hills, the sheep-shearing, would seem to him like the humble and patient waiting of man upon a bounteous Providence. There would be no systematic rotation of crops to make him marvel at the skill of the cultivator. Implements most skilfully adapted for the saving of animal labour would be unknown to him. The rude plough of his Saxon ancestors would be dragged along by a powerful team of sturdy oxen; the sound of the flail alone would be heard in the barn. Around him would, however, be the glad indications of plenty. The farmer would have abundant stacks, and beeves, and kine, though the supply would fail in precarious seasons, when price did not regulate consumption; he would brew his beer and bake his rye-bread; his swine would be fattening on the beech-mast and the acorns of the free wood: his skeps of bees would be numerous in his garden; the colewort would sprout from spring to winter for his homely meal, and in the fruitful season the strawberry would present its much coveted luxury. The old orchard would be rich with the choicest apples, grafts from the curious monastic varieties; the rarer fruits from southern climates would be almost wholly unknown. There would be no niggard economy defeating itself; the stock, such as it was, would be of the best, although no Bakewell had arisen to preside over its improvement:—

> "Let carren and barren be shifted away,
> For best is the best, whatsoever ye pay." *

William Shakspere would go out with his father on a Michaelmas morning, and the fields would be busy with the sowing of rye and white wheat and barley. The apples and the walnuts would be then gathered; honey and wax taken from the hives; timber would be felled, sawn, and stacked for seasoning. In the solitary fields, then, would stand the birdkeeper with his bow. As winter approached would come what Tusser calls "the slaughter-time," the killing of sheep and bullocks for home consumption; the thresher would be busy now and then for the farmer's family, but the wheat for the baker would lie in sheaf. No hurrying then to market for fear of a fall in price; there is abundance around, and the time of stint is far off. The simple routine was this:—

> "In spring-time we rear, we do sow, and we plant;
> In summer get victuals, lest after we want.
> In harvest we carry in corn, and the fruit,
> In winter to spend, as we need, of each suit." †

The joyous hospitality of Christmas had little fears that the stock would be prematurely spent; and whilst the mighty wood-fire blazed in the hall to the mirth of song and carol, neighbours went from house to house to partake of the abundance, and the poor were fed at the same board with the opulent. As the frost

* Tusser, chapter xvi † Ibid., chapter xxiv.

breaks, the labourer is again in the fields; hedging and ditching are somewhat understood, but the whole system of drainage is very rude. With such agriculture man seems to have his winter sleep as well as the earth. But nature is again alive; spring corn is to be sown; the ewes and lambs are to be carefully tended; the sheep, now again in the fields, are to be watched, for there are hungry "mastiffs and mongrels" about; the crow and pie are to be destroyed in their nests ere they are yet feathered; trees are to be barked before timber is fallen. Then comes the active business of the dairy, and, what to us would be a strange sight, the lambs have been taken from their mothers, and the ewes are milked in the folds. May demands the labour of the weed-hook; no horse-hoeing in those simple days. There are the flax and hemp too to be sown to supply the ceaseless labour of the spinner's wheel; bees are to be swarmed; and herbs are to be stored for the housewife's still. June brings its sheep-washing and shearing; with its haymaking, where the farmer is captain in the field, presiding over the bottles and the wallets from the hour when the dew is dry to set of sun. Bustle is there now to get "grist to the mill," for the streams are drying, and if the meal be wanting how shall the household be fed? The harvest-time comes; the reapers cry "largess" for their gloves; the tithe is set out for "Sir Parson;" and then, after the poor have gleaned, and the cattle have been turned in "to mouth up" what is left,

> "In harvest-time, harvest-folk, servants and all,
> Should make, all together, good cheer in the hall;
> And fill out the black bowl of blythe to their song,
> And let them be merry all harvest-time long." *

Such was the ancient farmer's year, which Tusser has described with wonderful spirit even to the minutest detail; and such were the operations of husbandry that the boy Shakspere would have beheld with interest amidst his native corn-fields and pastures. When the boy became deep-thoughted he would perceive that many things were ill understood, and most operations indifferently carried through. He would hear of dearth and sickness, and he would seek to know the causes. But that time was not as yet.

The poet who has delineated human life and character under every variety of passion and humour must have had some early experience of mankind. The loftiest imagination must work upon the humblest materials. In his father's home, amongst his father's neighbours, he would observe those striking differences in the tempers and habits of mankind which are obvious even to a child. Cupidity would be contrasted with generosity, parsimony with extravagance. He would hear of injustice and of ingratitude, of uprightness and of fidelity. Curiosity would lead him to the bailiff's court; and there he would learn of bitter quarrels and obstinate enmities, of friends parted "on a dissension of a doit," of foes who "interjoin their issues" to worry some wretched offender. Small ambition and empty pride would grow bloated upon the pettiest distinctions; and "the insolence of office" would thrust humility off the causeway.

* Tusser, chapter xlvii.

There would be loud talk of loyalty and religion, while the peaceful and the pious would be suspected; and the sycophant who wore the great man's livery would strive to crush the independent in spirit. Much of this the observing boy would see, but much also would be concealed in the general hollowness that belongs to a period of inquietude and change. The time would come when he would penetrate into the depths of these things; but meanwhile what was upon the surface would be food for thought. At the weekly Market there would be the familiar congregation of buyers and sellers. The housewife from her little farm would ride in gallantly between her panniers laden with butter, eggs, chickens, and capons. The farmer would stand by his pitched corn, and, as Harrison complains, if the poor man handled the sample with the intent to purchase his humble bushel, the man of many sacks would declare that it was sold. The engrosser, according to the same authority, would be there with his understanding nod, successfully evading every statute that could be made against forestalling, because no statutes could prevail against the power of the best price. There, before shops were many and their stocks extensive, would come the dealers from Birmingham and Coventry, with wares for use and wares for show,—horse-gear and women-gear, Sheffield whittles, and rings with posies. At the joyous Fair-season it would seem that the wealth of a world was emptied into Stratford; not only the substantial things, the wine, the wax, the wheat, the wool, the malt, the cheese, the clothes, the napery, such as even great lords sent their stewards to the Fairs to buy,* but every possible variety of such trumpery as fill the pedler's pack,—ribbons, inkles, caddises, coifs, stomachers, pomanders, brooches, tapes, shoe-ties. Great dealings were there on these occasions in beeves and horses, tedious chafferings, stout affirmations, saints profanely invoked to ratify a bargain. A mighty man rides into the Fair who scatters consternation around. It is the Queen's Purveyor. The best horses are taken up for her Majesty's use, at her Majesty's price; and they probably find their way to the Earl of Leicester's or the Earl of Warwick's stables at a considerable profit to Master Purveyor. The country buyers and sellers look blank; but there is no remedy. There is solace, however, if there is not redress. The ivy-bush is at many a door, and the sounds of merriment are within, as the ale and the sack are quaffed to friendly greetings. In the streets there are morris-dancers, the juggler with his ape, and the minstrel with his ballads. We can imagine the foremost in a group of boys listening to the "small popular musics sung by these *cantabanqui* upon benches and barrels' heads," or more earnestly to some one of the "blind harpers, or such-like tavern minstrels, that give a fit of mirth for a groat; their matters being for the most part stories of old time, as 'The Tale of Sir Topas,' 'Bevis of Southampton,' 'Guy of Warwick,' 'Adam Bell and Clymme of the Clough,' and such other old romances or historical rhymes, made purposely for the recreation of the common people.'† A bold fellow, who is full of queer stories and cant phrases, strikes a few notes upon his gittern, and the lads and lasses are around him ready to dance their

* See the Northumberland Household Book.

† Puttenham's 'Art of Poetry,' 1589.

country measures. He is thus described in the year 1564, in a tract by William Bulleyn: "Sir, there is one lately come into this hall, in a green Kendal coat, with yellow hose, a beard of the same colour, only upon the upper lip; a russet hat, with a great plume of strange feathers, and a brave scarf about his neck, in cut buskins. He is playing at the trey-trip with our host's son: he playeth trick upon the gittern, and dances 'Trenchmore' and 'Heie de Gie,' and telleth news from Terra Florida." Upon this strange sort of indigenous troubadour did the schoolboy gaze, for he would seem to belong to a more knowing race than dwelt on Avon's side. His "news from Terra Florida" tells us of an age of newstongues, before newspapers were. Doubtless such as he had many a story of home wonders; he had seen London perhaps; he could tell of Queens and Parliaments; might have beheld a noble beheaded, or a heretic burnt; he could speak, we may fancy, of the wonders of the sea; of ships laden with rich merchandize, unloading in havens far from this inland region; of other ships wrecked on inhospitable coasts, and poor men made rich by the ocean's spoils. Food for thought was there in all these things, seeds of poetry scattered carelessly, but not wastefully, in the rich imaginative soil

[The Fair.]

The Fair is over; the booths are taken down; the woollen statute-caps, which the commonest people refuse to wear because there is a penalty for not wearing them, are packed up again; the prohibited felt hats are all sold: the millinery has found a ready market amongst the sturdy yeomen, who are careful to

propitiate their home-staying wives after the fashion of the Wife of Bath's husbands:—

"I governed hem so well after my lawe,
That eche of hem full blissful was, and fawe
To bringen me gay thinges fro the feyre;
They were full glade," &c.

The juggler has packed up his cup and balls; the last cudgel-play has been fought out:—

"Near the dying of the day
There will be a cudgel-play,
Where a coxcomb will be broke,
Ere a good word can be spoke:
But the anger ends all here,
Drench'd in ale, or drown'd in beer." *

Morning comes, and Stratford hears only the quiet steps of its native population. But upon the bench, under the walnut-tree that spreads its broad arms to shadow a little inn, sits an old man, pensive, solitary; he was not noted in the crowd of yesterday,—louder voices and bolder faces carried the rewards which he had once earned. The old man is poor; yet is his gown of Kendal green not tattered though somewhat tarnished. The harp laid by his side upon the bench tells his profession. There was a time when he was welcomed at every hall, and he might fitly wear starched ruffs, and a chain of pewter as bright as silver, and have the wrest of his harp jauntily suspended by a green lace.† Those times are past. He scarcely now dares to enter worshipful men's houses; and at the Fairs a short song of love or good fellowship, or a dance to the gittern, are preferred to his tedious legends. He may now say with that luckless minstrel Richard Sheale (who, if his own chants are deplorable enough, has the merit of having assisted in the preservation of 'Chevy Chase'),—

"My audacity is gone, and all my merry talk;
There is some here have seen me as merry as a hawk;
But now I am so troubled with phan'sies in my mind,
That I cannot play the merry knave according to my kind."

There are two or three boys with satchel in hand gazing on that old minstrel; one of them bestows on him a penny, and goes his way. School-time is over, and as the boy returns the old man is still sunning himself on the ale-bench. He speaks cheerfully to the boy, and asks him his name. "William Shakspere." The old man's eye brightens. "A right good name," he exclaims; "a name for a soldier:" and then, with a clear but somewhat tremulous voice, he sings—

"Off all that se a Skottishe knight,
Was callyd Sir Hewe the Mongon-byrry,
He sawe the Duglas to the death was dyght;
He spendyd a spear a trusti tre:

* Herrick.

† See Laneham's description of the Minstrel at Kenilworth.

He rod uppon a corsiare
Throughe a hondrith archery;
He never styntyde, nar never blane,
Till he came to the good lord Persè.

He set uppone the lord Persè
A dynte, that was full soare,
With a suar spear of a mightè tre
Clean thorow the body he the Persè bore." *

The boy's heart is moved "more than with a trumpet," and he is not content till he has heard the whole of that "old song of Percy and Douglas." It is easy to imagine, further, that the poor minstrel lingered about Stratford; that he had welcome at least in one house; and that from time to time the memory of the grammar-school boy was not unprofitably employed in treasuring up snatches of old romances side by side with his syntax. Could not that old man tell all the veritable legend of Sir Guy, how he wed the fair Phillis, and, "all clad in grey in pilgrim-sort," voyaged to the Holy Land, and there slew the giant Amarant and the treacherous Knight of Pavye, and how he utterly did redeem England from Danish tribute, by slaying the giant Colbrand, and moreover destroyed the dragon of Northumberland, and the cow of Dunsmore Heath, whose bones even then might be seen at Warwick? And had he not viewed the cave at Guy's Cliff made by the champion's own hands out of a craggy rock of stone, where he long dwelt in poverty, begging his daily bread at his own castle-gate? This legend, indeed, would tell of wondrous deeds done close at hand; and the boy-poet would ardently desire to see the famous castle of Warwick, and the hermit's cave, where the lady of Sir Guy, having received their wedding-ring by a trusty servant, came in haste, and finding her sick lord, "herself closed up his dying eyes." The minstrel would affirm the truth of this legend; and his young listener would believe it all. There was not only boy-faith in those days, but there was faith in tradition even amongst worldly men. The imagination could rest confidingly upon the distant and the past. Even in the middle of the next century an antiquary, unequalled for industrious and minute inquiry, could surrender his belief to the general truth of the history of Sir Guy: "Of his particular adventures, lest what I say should be suspected for fabulous, I will only instance that combat betwixt him and the Danish champion, Colebrand, whom some (to magnify our noble Guy the more) report to have been a giant. The story whereof, however it may be thought fictitious by some, forasmuch as there be those that make a question whether there was ever really such a man; or, if so, whether all be not a dream which is reported of him, in regard that the monks have sounded out his praises so hyperbolically: yet those that are more considerate will neither doubt the one nor the other, inasmuch as it hath been so usual with our ancient historians, for the encouragement of after-ages unto bold attempts, to set forth the exploits of worthy men with the highest encomiums imaginable: and therefore, should we for that cause be so conceited as to explode it, all history

* Ancient ballad of 'Chevy Chase'—the one which Sidney describes as "evil apparelled in the dust and cobweb of that uncivil age."

of those times might as well be villified." * We are changed. Is the change for the better?

But the old minstrel has heroic songs that are not altogether of the marvellous. There was a story of Richard Cœur-de-Lion—

> "Against whose fury and unmatched force
> The awless lion could not wage the fight;" †

which told in homely verse how—

> "The lyon was hongry and megre,
> And bette his tayle to be egre."

There was the simple burst of patriotic exultation for the victory at Agincourt, beginning—

> "Owre kynge went forth to Normandy,
> With grace and myght of chivalry;
> The God for him wrought marvelously,
> Wherefore Englonde may calle, and cry
> Deo gratias:
> Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria."

Many a long "fitte" had he, which told of doughty deeds of Arthur and his chivalry, Sir Bevis, Sir Gawain, Sir Launfal, and Sir Isenbras; and, after he had preluded with his harp, the minstrel would begin each in stately wise with "Listen, lordlings, and hold you still," or "Listen to me a little stond." Pass we over all the merry tales of Robin Hood which fell triplingly from his tongue, for many of these were fresh in the memory of the people, and were sung in the greenwood or by the Christmas fire. But he had songs which he could scarcely sing without a tear in his eye, for they were remembrances of days when the minstrel was welcomed by the porter at the abbey-gate, and the buttery-hatch was unclosed to give him a generous meal. They were songs of pilgrimages made by true lovers to shrines of Our Lady,—songs that two centuries after were to be adopted in a more correct school of poetry, but one scarcely more spirited and natural:—

> "Gentle herdsman, tell to me,
> Of curtesy I thee pray,
> Unto the town of Walsingham
> Which is the right and ready way,"

has a fine racy melody about it, pleasanter we think, than the somewhat cloying

> "Turn, gentle hermit of the dale."

The minstrel has departed; but he has left behind him such lore as will be long cherished by that wondrous boy of the Free Grammar-school. There are many traces in the works of Shakspere of his familiarity with old romances and old ballads; but, like all his other acquirements, there is no reproduction of the same thing under a new form. Rowe fancied that Shakspere's knowledge of the learned languages was but small, because "it is without controversy that in

* Dugdale's 'Warwickshire,' page 299.

† King John, Act I. Scene I.

his works we scarce find any traces of anything that looks like an imitation of the ancients." It is for inferior men to imitate. It was for Shakspere to subject his knowledge to his original power of thought, so that his knowledge and his invention should become one perfect and entire substance; and thus the minute critic, who desires to find the classical jewels set in the English gold, proclaims that they are not there, *because* they were unknown and unappreciated by the uneducated poet. So of the traditionary lore with which Shakspere must have been familiar from his very boyhood. That lore is not in his writings in any very palpable shape, but its spirit is there. The simplicity, the vigour, the pathos, the essential dramatic power, of the ballad poetry stood out in Shakspere's boyhood in remarkable contrast to the drawling pedantry of the moral plays of the early stage. The ballads kept the love and the knowledge of real poetry in the hearts of the people. There was something high, and generous, and tolerant, in those which were most popular; something which demonstratively told they belonged to a nation which admired courage, which loved truth, which respected misfortune. Percy, speaking of the more ancient ballad of 'Chevy Chase,' says—"One may also observe a generous impartiality in the old original bard, when in the conclusion of his tale he represents both nations as quitting the field without any reproachful reflection on either; though he gives to his own countrymen the credit of being the smaller number." The author of that ballad was an Englishman; and we may believe this "impartiality" to have been an ingredient of the old English patriotism. At any rate it entered into the patriotism of Shakspere.

[The Boundary Elm, Stratford.]

CHAPTER VI.

HOLIDAYS.

It is the twenty-third of April, and the birthday of William Shakspere is a general holiday at Stratford. It is St. George's day. There is high feasting at Westminster or at Windsor. The green rushes are strewn in the outward courts of the Palace; the choristers lift up the solemn chants of the Litany as a procession advances from the Queen's Hall to her Chapel; the Heralds move on gorgeously in their coat-armour; the Knights of the Garter and the Sovereign glitter in their velvet robes; the Yeomen of the Guard close round in their richest liveries.* At Stratford there is humbler pageantry. Upon the walls of the Chapel of the Holy Cross there was a wondrous painting of a terrible dragon pierced through the neck with a spear; but he has snapped the

* See Nichols's 'Progresses of Elizabeth,' vol. i., p. 88.

weapon in two with his fearful talons, and a gallant knight in complete armour is uplifting his sword, whilst the bold horse which he bestrides rushes upon the monster with his pointed champfrein: * in the background is a crowned lady with a lamb; and on distant towers a king and queen watching the combat. This story of Saint George and the delivery of the Princess of Silene from the power of the dragon was, on the twenty-third of April, wont to be dramatized at Stratford. From the altar of Saint George was annually taken down, an ancient suit of harness, which was duly scoured and repaired; and from some storehouse was produced the figure of a dragon, which had also all needful annual reparation. Upon the back of some sturdy labourer was the harness fitted, and another powerful man had to bear the dragon, into whose body he no doubt entered. Then, all the dignitaries of the town being duly assembled, did Saint George and the Dragon march along, amidst the ringing of bells and the firing of chambers, and the shout of the patriotic population of "Saint George for England." † Here is the simplest of dramatic exhibitions, presented through a series of years to the observing eyes of a boy in whom the dramatic power of going out of himself to portray some incident, or character, or passion, with incomparable truth, was to be developed and matured in the growth of his poetical faculty. As he looked upon that rude representation of a familiar legend he may first have conceived the capability of exhibiting to the eye a moving picture of events, and of informing it with life by appropriate dialogue. But in truth the essentially dramatic spirit of the ancient church had infused itself thoroughly into the popular mind; and thus, long after the Reformation had swept away most of the ecclesiastical ceremonials that were held to belong to the superstitions of Popery, the people retained this principle of *personation* in their common festivals; and many were the occasions in which the boy and the man, the maiden and the matron, were called upon to enact some part, in which bodily activity and mental readiness might be required; in which something of grace and even of dignity might be called forth; in which a free but good-tempered wit might command the applause of uncritical listeners; and a sweet or mellow voice, pouring forth our nation's songs, would receive the exhilarating homage of a jocund chorus. Let us follow the boy William Shakspere, now, we will suppose, some ten or eleven years old, through the annual course of the principal rustic holidays, in which the yeoman and the peasant, the tradesman and the artisan, with their wives and children, were equally ready to partake. We may discover in these familiar scenes not only those peculiar forms of a dramatic spirit in real manners which might in some degree have given a direction to his genius, but, what is perhaps of greater importance, that poetical aspect of common life which was to supply materials of thought and of imagery

* The armour for the horse's head, with a long projecting spike, so as to make the horse resemble an unicorn.

† It appears from accounts which are given in fac-simile in Fisher's Work on the Chapel of the Guild that this procession repeatedly took place in the reign of Henry VIII.; and other accounts show that it was continued as late as 1579.

to him who was to become in the most eminent degree the poet of humanity in all its imaginative relations.

The festivities of Christmas are over. The opening year calls the husbandman again to his labours; and Plough Monday, with its plough dragged along to rustic music, and its sword-dance, proclaims that wassail must give place to work. The rosemary and the bays, the misletoe and the holly, are removed from the porch and the hall, and the delicate leaves of the box are twined into the domestic garland.* The Vigil of Saint Agnes has rewarded or disappointed the fateful charm of the village maiden. The husbandman has noted whether Saint Paul's day "be fair and clear," to guide his presages of the year's fertility. 'Cupid's Kalendere' has been searched on the day of "Seynte Valentine," as Lydgate tells. The old English chorus, which Shakspere himself has preserved, has been duly sung—

> "'Tis merry in hall, when beards wag all,
> And welcome merry Shrove-tide."

Easter is come, after a season of solemnity. The ashes were no longer blessed at the beginning of Lent, nor the palms borne at the close; yet there was strong devotion in the reformed church—real penitence and serious contemplation. But the day of gladness arrives—a joy which even the great eye of the natural world was to make manifest. Surely there was something exquisitely beautiful in the old custom of going forth into the fields before the sun had risen on Easter-day, to see him mounting over the hills with a tremulous motion, as if it were an animate thing bounding in sympathy with the redeemed of mankind. The young poet might have joined his simple neighbours on this cheerful morning, and yet have thought with Sir Thomas Browne, "We shall not, I hope, disparage the Resurrection of our Redeemer if we say that the sun doth *not* dance on Easter-day." But one of the most glorious images of one of his early plays has given life and movement to the sun:—

> "Night's candles are burnt out, and *jocund* day
> Stands *tiptoe* on the misty mountain's tops."

Saw he not the sun dance—heard he not the expression of the undoubting belief that the sun danced—as he went forth into Stratford meadows in the early twilight of Easter-day?

On the road to Henley-in-Arden, about two or three hundred yards from the house in Henley Street where John Shakspere once dwelt, there stood, when this Biography was first written, a very ancient boundary-tree—an elm which is recorded in a Presentment of the Perambulation of the boundaries of the Borough of Stratford, on the 7th of April, 1591, as "The Elme at the Dovehouse-Close end."† The boundary from that elm in the Henley road continued in another direction to "the two elms in Evesham highway." Such are the boundaries of the borough at this day. At a period, then, when it was usual for the boys of Grammar Schools to attend the annual perambulations in Rogation-week of the clergy, the magis-

* Herrick.

† The original came into the possession of R. Wheler, Esq., of Stratford.

trates and public officers, and the inhabitants, of parishes and towns,* would William Shakspere be found, in gleeful companionship, under this old boundary elm. There would be assembled the parish priest, and the schoolmaster, the bailiff and the churchwardens. Banners would wave, poles crowned with garlands would be carried by old and young. Under each *Gospel-tree*, of which this Dovehouse-Close Elm would be one, a passage from Scripture would be read, a collect recited, a psalm sung. With more pomp at the same season might the Doge of Venice espouse the Sea in testimony of the perpetual domination of the Republic, but not with more heartfelt joy than these the people of Stratford traced the boundaries of their little sway. The Reformation left us these parochial processions. In the 7th year of Elizabeth (1565) the form of devotion for the "Rogation days of Procession" was prescribed, "without addition of any superstitious ceremonies heretofore used;" and it was subsequently ordered that the curate on such occasions "shall admonish the people to give thanks to God in the beholding of God's benefits," and enforce the scriptural denouncements against those who removed their neighbours' landmarks. Beautifully has Walton described how Hooker encouraged these annual ceremonials:—"He would by no means omit the customary time of procession, persuading all, both rich and poor, if they desired the preservation of love and their parish rights and liberties, to accompany him in his perambulation; and most did so: in which perambulation he would usually express more pleasant discourse than at other times, and would then always drop some loving and facetious observations, to be remembered against the next year, especially by the boys and young people; still inclining them, and all his present parishioners, to meekness and mutual kindnesses and love, because love thinks not evil, but covers a multitude of infirmities." And so, perhaps, listening to the gentle words of some venerable Hooker of his time, would the young Shakspere walk the bounds of his native parish. One day would not suffice to visit its numerous Gospel-trees. Hours would be spent in reconciling differences amongst the cultivators of the common fields; in largesses to the poor; in merry-making at convenient halting-places. A wide parish is this of Stratford, including eleven villages and hamlets. A district of beautiful and varied scenery is this parish—hill and valley, wood and water. Following the Avon upon the north bank, against the stream, for some two miles, the processionists would walk through low and fertile meadows, unenclosed pastures then in all likelihood. A little brook falls into the river, coming down from the marshy uplands of Ingon, where, in spite of modern improvement, the frequent bog attests the accuracy of Dugdale's description.† The brook is traced upwards into the hills of Welcombe; and then for nearly three miles from Welcombe Greenhill the boundary lies along a wooded ridge, opening prospects of surpassing beauty. There may the distant spires of Coventry be seen peeping above the intermediate hills, and the nearer towers of Warwick lying cradled in their surrounding woods. In another direction a cloud-like spot in the

* See Brand's 'Popular Antiquities,' by Sir H. Ellis, edit. 1841, vol. i., p. 123.

† See p. 29.

extreme distance is the far-famed Wrekin; and turning to the north-west are the noble hills of Malvern, with their well-defined outlines. The Cotswolds lock-in the landscape on another side; while in the middle distance the bold Bredon-hill looks down upon the vale of Evesham. All around is a country of unrivalled fertility, with now and then a plain of considerable extent; but more commonly a succession of undulating hills, some wood-crowned, but all cultivated. At the northern extremity of this high land, which principally belongs to the estate of Clopton, and which was doubtless a park in early times, we have a panoramic view of the valley in which Stratford lies, with its hamlets of Bishopton, Little Wilmecote, Shottery, and Drayton. As the marvellous boy of the Stratford grammar-school then looked upon that plain, how little could he have foreseen the course of his future life! For twenty years of his manhood he was to have no constant dwelling-place in that his native town; but it was to be the home of his affections. He would be gathering fame and opulence in an almost untrodden path, of which his young ambition could shape no definite image; but in the prime of his life he was to bring his wealth to his own Stratford, and become the proprietor and the contented cultivator of some of the loved fields that he now saw mapped out at his feet. Then, a little while, and an early tomb under that grey tower—a tomb so to be honoured in all ages to come,

"That kings for such a tomb would wish to die."

For some six miles the boundary runs from north to south, partly through land which was formerly barren, and still known as Drayton Bushes and Drayton Wild Moor. Here,

"Far from her nest the lapwing cries away." *

The green bank of the Avon is again reached at the western extremity of the boundary, and the pretty hamlet of Luddington, with its cottages and old trees standing high above the river sedges, is included. The Avon is crossed where the Stour unites with it; and the boundary extends considerably to the south-east, returning to the town over Clopton's Bridge. Where once were quiet pastures there is now the Stratford Railway for the conveyance of coal and corn—a thing undreamt of by the perambulators. But there is a greater marvel of modern science associated with the name of Shakspere. The cliff at Dover, whose base was inaccessible except to

"The fishermen that walk upon the beach,"

is now pierced through by the tunnel of a railway. A few centuries, a thousand years, and the arches of the tunnel may be fallen in, its mouth choked with shingle and sea-weed, and some solitary antiquarian poking with his small lantern amongst its rubbish. But the rock itself will be unchanged; and so will be the memorable description of "its high and bending head." And he who wrote that description, and painted the awful turmoil of human passion and misery associated with that rock, is at the time of which we speak a happy

* Comedy of Errors.

schoolboy at Stratford; perambulating his parish with his honest father; made joyful, perhaps, with a kind word or two from the great esquire; and smiling to himself at the recollection of "some loving and facetious observations" of the good vicar. All the rest of that group, where are their honours now? It is something to know that when William Shakspere was twelve years old, Henry Heycroft was vicar of Stratford, and William Clopton the great man of the parish. If they bestowed kindness upon that boy, as upon other boys; if they cherished the poor; if they reconciled differences; if they walked humbly in their generation,—they have their reward, though the world has forgotten them.

Shottery, the prettiest of hamlets, is scarcely a mile from Stratford. Here, in all probability, dwelt one who in a few years was to have an important influence upon the destiny of the boy-poet. A Court Roll of the 34th Henry VIII. (1543) shows us that John Hathaway then resided at Shottery; and the substantial house which the Hathaways possessed, now divided into several cottages, remained with their descendants till the very recent period of 1838. There were Hathaways, also, living in the town of Stratford, contemporaries of John Shakspere. We cannot say, absolutely, that Anne Hathaway, the future wife of William Shakspere, was of Shottery; but the prettiest of maidens (for the veracious antiquarian Oldys says there is a tradition that she was eminently beautiful) would have fitly dwelt in the pleasantest of hamlets. Tieck has written an agreeable novelet, 'The Festival at Kenilworth,' on the subject of Shakspere—introductory to another on the same subject, 'Poet-Life.' He makes, somewhat unnecessarily we think, John Shakspere morose and harsh to his boy; and he brings in Anne Hathaway to obtain his consent that William shall go to Kenilworth: "Anne took the graceful youth in her arms, and said, laughingly, 'Father Shakspere, you know William is my sweetheart, and belongs as much to me as to you; we have promised one another long ago, and if I go to Kenilworth he must go with me.' William withdrew himself, half-ashamed, from the arms of the mischievous girl, and said, with great feeling, 'Cease, Anne; you know I cannot bear this: I am too young for you.'" There is verisimilitude in this scene, if not truth; and it is easy to comprehend how the playful friendship of a handsome maiden for an interesting boy, some seven years younger, might grow into a dangerous affection. Assuredly, with neighbourly intercourse between their families, William Shakspere would be at Shottery,

"To do observance to a morn of May;"*

and indeed, to be just to the youths and maidens of Stratford and Shottery, it was "impossible"

"To make them sleep
On May-day morning." †

Pass the back of the cottage in which the Hathaways dwelt (of which we shall hereafter have to speak) and enter that beautiful meadow which rises into a

* Midsummer-Night's Dream. † Henry VIII.

gentle eminence commanding the hamlet at several points. Throw down the hedges, and is there not here the fittest of localities for the May-games? An impatient group is gathered under the shade of the old elms, for the morning sun casts his slanting beams dazzlingly across that green. There is the distant sound of tabor and bagpipe:—

"Hark, hark! I hear the dancing,
And a nimble morris prancing;
The bagpipe and the morris bells,
That they are not far hence us tells." *

From out of the leafy Arden are they bringing in the May-pole. The oxen move slowly with the ponderous wain: they are garlanded, but not for the sacrifice. Around the spoil of the forest are the pipers and the dancers—maidens in blue kirtles, and foresters in green tunics. Amidst the shouts of young and old, childhood leaping and clapping its hands, is the May-pole raised. But there are great personages forthcoming—not so great, however, as in more ancient times. There are Robin Hood and Little John, in their grass-green tunics; but their bows and their sheaves of arrows are more for show than use. Maid Marian is there; but she is a mockery—a smooth-faced youth in a watchet-coloured tunic, with flowers and coronets, and a mincing gait, but not the shepherdess who

"With garlands gay
Was made the lady of the May." †

There is farce amidst the pastoral. The age of unrealities has already in part arrived. Even amongst country-folks there is burlesque. There is personation, with a laugh at the things that are represented. The Hobby-horse and the Dragon, however, produce their shouts of merriment. But the hearty Morris-dancers soon spread a spirit of genial mirth amidst all the spectators. The clownish Maid Marian will now

"Caper upright like a wild Morisco;" ‡

Friar Tuck sneaks away from his ancient companions to join hands with some undisguised maiden; the Hobby-horse gets rid of pasteboard and his foot-cloth; and the Dragon quietly deposits his neck and tail for another season. Something like the genial chorus of 'Summer's Last Will and Testament' is rung out:—

"Trip and go, heave and ho,
Up and down, to and fro,
From the town to the grove,
Two and two, let us rove,
A Maying, a playing;
Love hath no gainsaying:
So merrily trip and go."

The early-rising moon still sees the villagers on that green of Shottery. The Piper leans against the May-pole; the featliest of dancers still swim to his music:—

* Weelkes's Madrigals, 1600.
† Nicholas Breton ‡ Henry VI., Part II.

"So have I seen
Tom Piper stand upon our village green,
Back'd with the May-pole, whilst a jocund crew
In gentle motion circularly threw
Themselves around him." *

The same beautiful writer—one of the last of our golden age of poetry—has described the parting gifts bestowed upon the "merry youngsters" by

"The lady of the May
Set in an arbour, (on a holy-day,)
Built by the May-pole, where the jocund swains
Dance with the maidens to the bagpipe's strains,
When envious night commands them to be gone." †

It is easy to believe that Anne Hathaway might have been the Lady of the May of Shottery; and that the enthusiastic boy upon whom she bestowed "a garland interwove with roses" might have cherished that gift with a gratitude that was not for his peace.

* Browne's 'Britannia's Pastorals,' Book ii., Second Song. † Book ii., Fourth Song.

[Shottery.]

Eight villages in the neighbourhood of Stratford have been characterized in well-known lines by some old resident who had the talent of rhyme. It is remarkable how familiar all the country-people are to this day with these lines, and how invariably they ascribe them to Shakspere:—

> "Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
> Haunted Hillborough, hungry Grafton,
> Dudging * Exhall, Papist Wicksford,
> Beggarly Broom, and drunken Bidford."

It is maintained that these epithets have a real historical truth about them; and so we must place the scene of a Whitsun-Ale at Bidford. Aubrey has given a sensible account of such a festivity:—"There were no rates for the poor in my grandfather's days; but for Kingston St. Michael (no small parish) the Church-Ale of Whitsuntide did the business. In every parish is, or was, a church-house, to which belonged spits, crocks, &c., utensils for dressing provision. Here the housekeepers met and were merry, and gave their charity. The young people were there, too, and had dancing, bowling, shooting at butts, &c., the ancients sitting gravely by, and looking on. All things were civil, and without scandal." † The puritan Stubbes took a more severe view of the matter than Aubrey's grandfather:—"In certain towns where drunken Bacchus bears sway, against Christmas and Easter, Whitsuntide, or some other time, the churchwardens of every parish, with the consent of the whole parish, provide half a score or twenty quarters of malt, whereof some they buy of the church-stock, and some is given them of the parishioners themselves, every one conferring somewhat, according to his ability; which malt, being made into very strong ale or beer, is set to sale, either in the church or some other place assigned to that purpose. Then, when this is set abroach, well is he that can get the soonest to it, and spend the most at it." ‡ Carew, the historian of Cornwall (1602), says, "The neighbour parishes at those times lovingly visit one another, and this way frankly spend their money together." Thus lovingly might John Shakspere and his friends on a Whit-Monday morning have ridden by the pleasant road to Bidford—now from some little eminence beholding their Avon flowing amidst a low meadow on one side and a wood-crowned steep on the other, turning a mill-wheel, rushing over a dam—now carefully wending their way through the rough road under the hill, or galloping over the free downs, glad to escape from rut and quagmire. And then the Icknield Street § is crossed, and they look down upon the little town with its gabled roofs; and they pass the old church, whose tower gives forth a lusty peal; and the hostel at the bridge receives them; and there is the cordial welcome, the outstretched hand and the full cup.

But nearer home Whitsuntide has its sports also; and these will be more attractive for William Shakspere. Had not Stratford its "Lord of Whitsun-

* Sulky, stubborn, in dudgeon.
† Miscellanies. ‡ Anatomy of Abuses, 1585.
§ The Roman way which runs near Bidford.

[Bidford Bridge.]

tide?" Might the boy not behold at this season innocence wearing a face of freedom like his own Perdita?—

> "Come, take your flowers:
> Methinks, I play as I have seen them do
> In Whitsun pastorals."

Would there not be in some cheerful mansion a simple attempt at dramatic representation, such as his Julia has described in her assumed character of a page?—

> "At Pentecost,
> When all our pageants of delight were play'd,
> Our youth got me to play the woman's part;
> And I was trimm'd in madam Julia's gown;
> Which served me as fit, in all men's judgments,
> As if the garment had been made for me
> Therefore, I know she is about my height.
> And at that time I made her weep a-good,
> For I did play a lamentable part:
> Madam, 't was Ariadne, passioning
> For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight." †

Certainly on that holiday some one would be ready to recite a moving tale from Gower or from Chaucer—a fragment of the 'Confessio Amantis' or of the 'Troilus and Creseide:'—

> "It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember eves, and holy-ales." ‡

The elements of poetry would be around him; the dramatic spirit of the people

* Winter's Tale, Act IV., Scene III. † Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act IV., Sc. III.
‡ Pericles, Act I.

would be struggling to give utterance to its thoughts, and even then he might cherish the desire to lend it a voice.

The sheep-shearing—that, too, is dramatic. Drayton, the countryman of our poet, has described the shepherd-king :—

> " But, Muse, return to tell how there the shepherd-king,
> Whose flock hath chanc'd that year the earliest lamb to bring,
> In his gay baldric sits at his low grassy board,
> With flawns, curds, clouted cream, and country dainties stor'd :
> And, whilst the bagpipe plays, each lusty jocund swain
> Quaffs syllabubs in cans to all upon the plain ;
> And to their country girls, whose nosegays they do wear,
> Some roundelays do sing,—the rest the burden bear." *

The vale of Evesham is the scene of Drayton's sheep-shearing. But higher up the Avon there are rich pastures ; and shallow bays of the clear river, where the washing may be accomplished. Such a bay, so used, is there near the pretty village of Alveston, about two miles above Stratford. One of the most delicious scenes of the Winter's Tale is that of the sheep-shearing, in which we have the more poetical shepherd-*queen*. There is a minuteness of circumstance amidst the exquisite poetry of this scene which shows that it must have been founded upon actual observation, and in all likelihood upon the keen and prying observation of a boy occupied and interested with such details. Surely his father's pastures and his father's homestead might have supplied all these circumstances. His father's man might be the messenger to the town, and reckon upon " counters" the cost of the sheep-shearing feast. " Three pound of sugar, five pound of currants, rice "—and then he asks, " What will this sister of mine do with rice ? " In Bohemia, the clown might, with dramatic propriety, not know the use of rice at a sheep-shearing ; but a Warwickshire swain would have the flavour of cheese-cakes in his mouth at the first mention of rice and currants. Cheese-cakes and warden-pies were the sheep-shearing delicacies. How absolutely true is the following picture :—

> " Fie, daughter ! when my old wife liv'd, upon
> This day she was both pantler, butler, cook ;
> Both dame and servant : welcom'd all, serv'd all
> Would sing her song, and dance her turn ; now here
> At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle ;
> On his shoulder, and his : her face o' fire
> With labour ; and the thing she took to quench it
> She would to each one sip."

This is the literal painting of a Teniers ; but the same hand could unite the unrivalled grace of a Correggio. William Shakspere might have had some boyish dreams of a " mistress o' the feast," who might have suggested his Perdita ; but such a creation is of higher elements than those of the earth. Such a bright vision is something more than " a queen of curds and cream."

The poet who says

> " Come, ho, and wake Diana with a hymn ;
> With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
> And *draw her home with music*," †

* Polyolbion, Song XIV.

† Merchant of Venice, Act v., Scene I.

had seen the Hock-Cart of the old harvest-home. It was the same that Paul Hentzner saw at Windsor in 1598: "As we were returning to our inn we happened to meet some country-people celebrating their Harvest-home. Their last load of corn they crown with flowers, having besides an image richly dressed, by which perhaps they would signify Ceres. This they keep moving about, while men and women, men and maid-servants, riding through the streets in the cart, shout as loud as they can till they arrive at the barn." In the reign of James I., Moresin, another foreigner, saw a figure made of corn drawn home in a cart, with men and women singing to the pipe and the drum. And then Puritanism arose, to tell us that all such expressions of the heart were pagan and superstitious, relics of Popery, abominations of the Evil One. Robert Herrick, full of the old poetical feeling, sung the glories of the Hock Cart in the time of Charles I.: but a severe religion, and therefore an unwise one, denounced all such festivals as the causes of debauchery; and so the debauchery alone remained with us. The music and the dancing were banished, but the strong drinks were left. Herrick tells us that the ceremonies of the Hock-Cart were performed "with great devotion." Assuredly they were. Devotion is that which knocks the worldly shackles off the spirit; strikes a spark out of our hard and dry natures; enforces the money-getter for a moment to forego his gain, and the penniless labourer to forget his hunger-satisfying toil. Devotion is that which brings a tear into the eye, and makes the heart throb against the bosom, in silent forests where the doe gazes fearlessly upon the unaccustomed form of man, by rocks overhanging the sea, in the gorge of the mountains, in the cloister of the cathedral when the organ-peal comes and goes like the breath of flowers, in the crowded city when joyous multitudes shout by one impulse. Devotion lived amidst old ceremonials derived from a long antiquity; it waited upon the seasons; it hallowed the seed-time and the harvest, and made the frosts cheerful. And thus it grew into Religion. The feeling became a principle. But the formalists came, and required men to be devout without imagination; to have faith, rejecting tradition and authority, and all the genial impulses of love and reverence associated with the visible world,—the practical poetry of life, which is akin to faith. And so we are what we are, and not what God would have us to be.

We have retained Christmas; a starveling Christmas; one day of excessive eating for all ages, and Twelfth-cake for the children. It is something that relations meet on Christmas-day; that for one day in the year the outward shows of rivalry and jealousy are not visible; that the poor cousin puts on his best coat to taste port with his condescending host of the same name; that the portionless nieces have their annual guinea from their wealthy aunt. But where is the real festive exhilaration of Christmas; the meeting of all ranks as children of a common father; the tenant speaking freely in his landlord's hall; the labourers and their families sitting at the same great oak table; the Yule Log brought in with shout and song?

"No night is now with hymn or carol blest." *

* Midsummer Night's Dream.

There are singers of carols even now at a Stratford Christmas. Warwickshire has retained some of its ancient carols. But the singers are wretched chorus-makers, according to the most unmusical style of all the generations from the time of the Commonwealth. There are no "three-man song-men" amongst them, no "means and bases;" there is not even "a Puritan" who "sings psalms to hornpipes."* They have retained such of the carols as will most provoke mockery:—

"Rise up, rise up, brother Dives,
And come along with me,
For you've a place provided in hell,
Upon a sarpant's knee."

And then the crowd laugh, and give their halfpennies. But in an age of music we may believe that one young dweller in Stratford gladly woke out of his innocent sleep, after the evening bells had rung him to rest, when in the stillness of the night the psaltery was gently touched before his father's porch, and he heard, one voice under another, these simple and solemn strains:—

"As Joseph was a-walking
He heard an angel sing,
This night shall be born
Our heavenly king.

He neither shall be born
In housen nor in hall,
Nor in the place of Paradise,
But in an ox's stall.

He neither shall be clothed
In purple nor in pall,
But all in fair linen,
As were babies all.

He neither shall be rock'd
In silver nor in gold,
But in a wooden cradle
That rocks on the mould."

London has perhaps this carol yet, amongst its halfpenny ballads. A man whose real vocation was mistaken in his busy time, for he had a mind attuned to the love of what was beautiful in the past, instead of being enamoured with the ugly disputations of the present, has preserved it;† but it was for another age. It was for the age of William Shakspere. It was for the age when superstition, as we call it, had its poetical faith:—

"Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm:
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."‡

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* Winter's Tale.

† William Hone's 'Ancient Mysteries,' p. 92.

‡ Hamlet, Act I., Scene I.

Surely it is the poet himself, who adds, in the person of Horatio,

"So have I heard, *and do in part believe it.*"

Such a night was a preparation for a "happy Christmas;"—the prayers of an earnest Church, the Anthem, the Hymn, the Homily. The cross of Stratford was garnished with the holly, the ivy, and the bay. Hospitality was in every house; but the hall of the great landlord of the parish was a scene of rare conviviality. The frost or the snow will not deter the principal friends and tenants from the welcome of Clopton. There is the old house, nestled in the woods, looking down upon the little town. Its chimneys are reeking; there is bustle in the offices; the sound of the trumpeters and the pipers is heard through the open door of the great entrance; the steward marshals the guests; the tables are fast filling. Then advance, courteously, the master and the mistress of the feast. The Boar's head is brought in with due solemnity; the wine-cup goes round; and perhaps the Saxon shout of Waes-hael and Drink-hael may still be shouted. The boy-guest who came with his father, the tenant of Ingon, has slid away from the rout; for the steward, who loves the boy, has a sight to make him merry. The Lord of Misrule, and his jovial attendants, are rehearsing their speeches; and the mummers from Stratford are at the porch. Very sparing are the cues required for the enactment of this short drama. A speech to the esquire, closed with a merry jest; something about ancestry and good Sir Hugh; the loud laugh; the song and the chorus,—and the Lord of Misrule is now master of the feast. The Hall is cleared: "Away

[Clopton House.]

with the joint-stools, remove the court-cupboard, look to the plate." * There is dancing till Curfew; and then a walk in the moonlight to Stratford, the pale beam shining equally upon the dark resting-place in the lonely aisle of the Clopton who is gone, and upon the festal hall of the Clopton who remains, where some loiterers of the old and the young still desire

"To burn this night with torches." †

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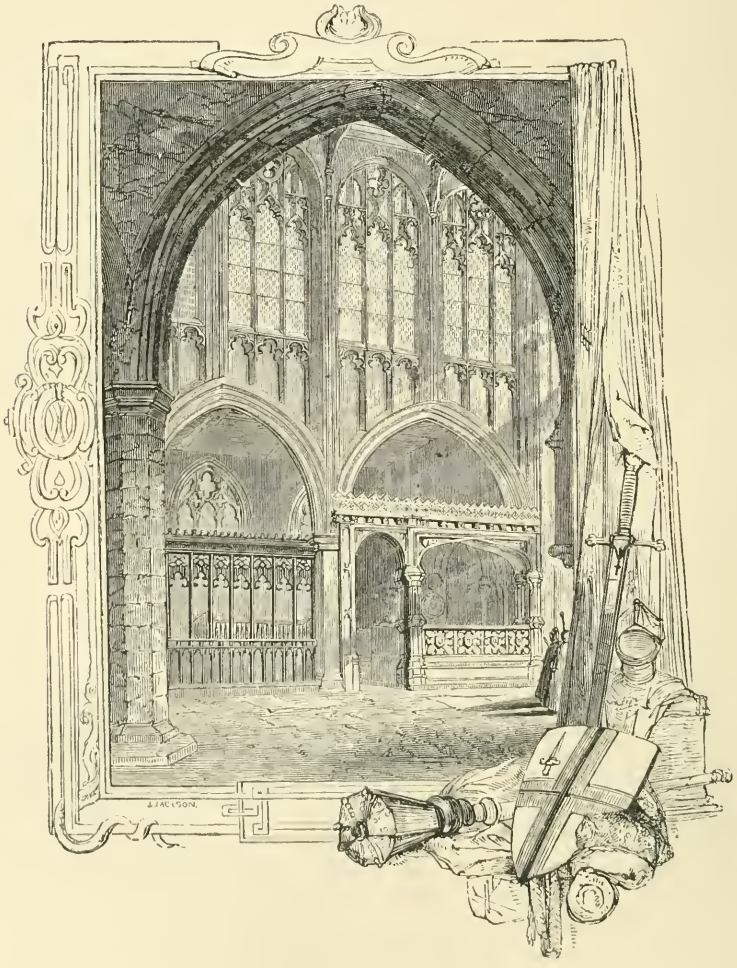
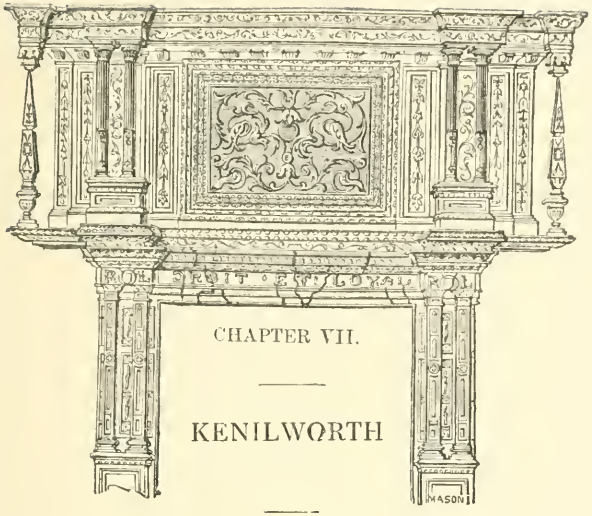
* Romeo and Juliet, Act I., Scene V. † Antony and Cleopatra, Act IV., Scene II.



[The Clopton Monument in Stratford Church.]



CHAPTER VII.

KENILWORTH

Was William Shakspere at Kenilworth in that summer of 1575, when the great Dudley entertained Elizabeth with a splendour which annalists have delighted to record, and upon which one of our own days has bestowed a fame more imperishable than that of any annals? Percy, speaking of the old Coventry Hock-play, says, "Whatever this old play or storial show was at the time it was exhibited to Queen Elizabeth, it had probably our young Shakspere for a spectator, who was then in his twelfth year, and doubtless attended with all the inhabitants of the surrounding country at these 'princely pleasures of Kenilworth,' whence Stratford is only a few miles distant." * The preparations for this celebrated entertainment were on so magnificent a scale, the purveyings must have been so enormous, the posts so unintermitting, that there had needed not the flourishings of paragraphs (for the age of paragraphs was not as yet) to have roused the curiosity of all mid-England. Elizabeth had visited Kenilworth on two previous occasions. In 1565, after she had created Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, she bore her sunshine to the possessions she had given to her favourite; and passing through Coventry, "she was honourably received by the mayor and citizens with many fair shows and pageants." It was on this occasion that Humphrey Brownell, the Mayor, must have delighted the Queen with his impromptu speech, worth a hundred

* 'On the Origin of the English Stage:'—Reliques, vol. i.

of the magnificent orations of John Throgmorton the Recorder. Elizabeth had a ready hand for the rich gifts of her subjects; and when on their knees the Corporation of Coventry presented her Majesty a heavy purse, her satisfaction broke out into the exclamation, "A good gift, a hundred pounds in gold! I have but few such gifts!" The words were addressed to her lords; but the honest Mayor boldly struck in, "If it please your grace, there is a great deal more in it." "What is that?" said the Queen. "The hearts of all your loving subjects," replied the Mayor.* Elizabeth on this occasion departed from Kenilworth offended with Leicester. Had he been too bold or too timid? In the summer of 1572 the royal progress was again for Warwickshire. "The weather having been very foul long time before, and the way much stained with carriage," the Queen was conveyed into her good town of Warwick through bye-ways not quite so miry; but the bailiff and the burgesses knelt in the dirt, and her Majesty's coach was brought as near to the said kneelers as it could be. The long oration, and the heavy purse, of course followed. During this visit to Kenilworth in 1572 two important state affairs were despatched. Thomas Percy Earl of Northumberland was beheaded at York; and the offer of marriage of Francis Duke of Alençon was definitively rejected. In the previous June, Leicester wrote touching this proposal,—"It seems her Majesty meaneth to give good ear to it." There was a counsellor at Kenilworth in the following August who would possess the Queen's "good ear" in a more eminent degree than Montmorenci, the French Ambassador. In 1575, when Robert Dudley welcomed his sovereign with a more than regal magnificence, it is easy to believe that his ambition looked for a higher reward than that of continuing a queen's most favoured servant and counsellor. It is tolerably clear that the exquisite speech of Oberon in A Midsummer Night's Dream is associated with some of the poetical devices which the young Shakspere might have beheld at Kenilworth, or have heard described:—

"*Obe.* My gentle Puck, come hither: Thou remember'st
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
That the rude sea grew civil at her song;
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.
Puck. I remember.
Obe. That very time I saw, (but thou couldst not,)
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd; a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal, throned by the west;
And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon;
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free."

* See Nichols's 'Progresses,' vol. i., p. 192.

[Elizabeth.]

The most remarkable of the shows of Kenilworth were associated with the mythology and the romance of lakes and seas. "Triton, in likeness of a mermaid, came towards the Queen's Majesty." "Arion appeared sitting on a dolphin's back." So the quaint and really poetical George Gascoigne, in his 'Brief Rehearsal, or rather a true copy of as much as was presented before her Majesty at Kenilworth.' But the diffuse and most entertaining coxcomb Laneham describes a song of Arion with an ecstacy which may justify the belief that the "dulcet and harmonious breath" of "the sea-maid's music" might be the echo of the melodies heard by the young poet as he stood beside the lake at Kenilworth:—"Now, Sir, the ditty in metre so aptly endited to the matter, and after by voice deliciously delivered; the song, by a skilful artist into his parts so sweetly sorted; each part in his instrument so clean and sharply touched; every instrument again in his kind so excellently tunable; and this in the evening of the day, resounding from the calm waters, where the presence of her Majesty, and longing to listen, had utterly damped all noise and din, the whole harmony conveyed in time, tune, and temper, thus incomparably melodious; with what pleasure (Master Martin), with what sharpness of conceit, with what lively delight, this might pierce into the hearers' hearts, I pray ye imagine yourself, as ye may." If Elizabeth be the "fair vestal throned by the west," of which there can be no reasonable doubt, the most appropriate scene of the mermaid's song would be Kenilworth, and "that very time" the summer of 1575. Of the hidden meaning of that song we shall have presently to speak.

Percy, believing that the boy Shakspere was at Kenilworth, has remarked, with his usual taste and judgment, that "the dramatic cast of many parts of that superb entertainment must have had a very great effect upon a young imagination, whose dramatic powers were hereafter to astonish the world." Without assuming with Percy that "our young bard gained admittance into the castle" on the evening when "after supper there was a play of a very good theme presented; but so set forth, by the actors' well handling, that pleasure and mirth made it seem very short, though it lasted two good hours and more;"* yielding not our consent to Tieck's fiction, that the boy performed the part of 'Echo' in Gascoigne's address to the Queen, and was allowed to see the whole of the performances by the especial favour of her Majesty,—we shall run over the curious narratives of Laneham and of Gascoigne, to show that, without being a favoured spectator, William Shakspere with his friends might have beheld many things on this occasion which "must have had a very great effect upon a young imagination," and have assisted still further in giving it that dramatic tendency which, as we have endeavoured already to point out, was a peculiar characteristic of the simplest and the commonest festivals of his age.

It was eight o'clock in the evening of Saturday the 9th of July when, after "great cheer at dinner," at a place seven miles from Kenilworth, and "pleasant pastime in hunting by the way after," Elizabeth arrived within "a flight-shoot" of the first gate of the castle. The open space before that gate would be crowded with spectators, some, worn out with long waiting, stretched beneath the trees of the park, others gazing upon the leads and battlements, where stood, "six trumpeters hugely advanced, much exceeding the common stature of men in this age, who had likewise huge and monstrous trumpets counterfeited, wherein they seemed to sound."† But before the real trumpeters hidden behind them sounded, Sibylla, "comely clad in a pall of white silk, pronounced a proper poesy in English rhyme and metre."‡ Sibylla would, we are sure, repeat to the crowd what she had addressed to the Queen; for Master Hunnis, master of her Majesty's chapel, would desire all honour for his pleasant verses:—

> "The rage of war bound fast in chains
> Shall never stir nor move;
> But peace shall govern all your days,
> Increasing subjects' love."

It was through the gate of the tilt-yard, on the south side of the castle, and not by the great gate-house on the north, that Elizabeth entered. Little would the crowd hear therefore of the speech of the mighty porter, "tall of person, big of limb, and stern of countenance," who met the Queen at the gate of Mortimer's Tower, which led into the base-court; and, indeed, even for ourselves, Gascoigne and Laneham might have spared their descriptions, for a mightier than they has described this part of the ceremonial after his own fashion. The

* Laneham. † Gascoigne.

‡ Laneham. As we shall quote fragments from each writer, it will be scarcely necessary to refer to them on every occasion.

gate croses upon the train, when the Lady of the Lake, "from the midst of the pool, where, upon a moveable island, bright blazing with torches, she floated to land, met her Majesty with a well-penned metre." The wearied Queen had yet more to endure; there were Latin verses to be pronounced before she could be conveyed up to her chamber; and then "after did follow so great a peal of guns, and such lightning by firework," that "the noise and flame were heard and seen twenty miles off."

Sunday was a day of rest; but Monday brought another of the store of dramatic devices—open-air recitations, which Elizabeth would be best pleased to hear with the people crowding around her. In the evening of a hot day the Queen rode into the chase "to hunt the hart of force;" and upon her return by torchlight there came forth out of the woods a savage man, "with an oaken plant, plucked up by the roots, in his hand, himself foregrown all in moss and ivy, who, for personage, gesture, and utterance beside, countenanced the matter to very good liking." The savage man, and his attendant 'Echo,' may appear to us a rude device, and there would be little dramatic propriety in the man "all in ivy" pouring forth such verses as,—

> "The winds resound your worth,
> The rocks record your name,
> These hills, these dales, these woods, these waves,
> These fields, pronounce your fame."

The days of the gorgeous and refined masque were not yet come; the drama had almost wholly to be created. But the writer of these lines, a man of considerable talent, was evidently proud of his invention of the savage man and his echo, for he says, with a laughable humility, "These verses were devised, penned, and pronounced, by Master Gascoigne; and that (as I have heard credibly reported) upon a very great sudden." To William Shakspere such representations, rude as they were, must have been exceedingly impressive. The scene was altogether one of romance. That magnificent castle, its stately woods, its pleasant lake, its legends of King Arthur, its histories of the Montforts and the Mortimers, its famous revivals of the Round Table, the presence of a real Queen, the peaceable successor of the fiery Yorkists and Lancastrians who had once inhabited it,—would stir his imagination even though he saw not the devices and heard not the poetry. The enthusiasm of Master Gascoigne, when he pronounced the wild man's address, bordered a little upon the extravagant, according to Laneham: "As this savage, for the more submission, broke his tree asunder, and cast the top from him, it had almost light upon her Highness's horse's head; whereat he startled, and the gentleman much dismayed." The recollection of the savage man's ecstacy might have slept in the mind of the young poet till it shaped itself into the passion of Biron:—

> "Who sees the heavenly Rosaline,
> That, like a rude and savage man of Inde,
> At the first opening of the gorgeous east,
> Bows not his vassal head; and, strucken blind,
> Kisses the base ground with obedient breast?" *

* Love's Labour's Lost, Act iv., Scene 1.

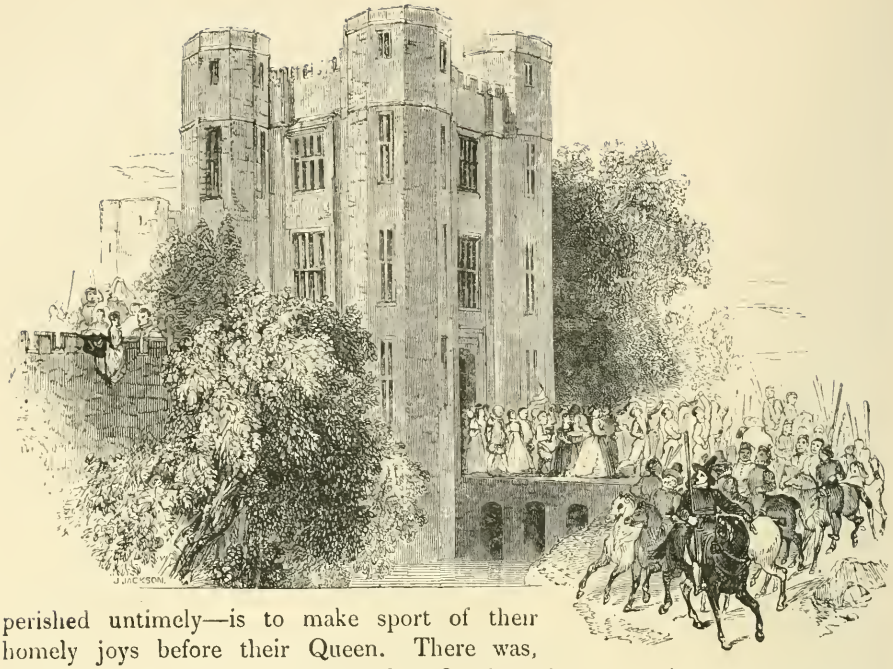
[Gascoigne.]

Thursday, the fourteenth of July, saw a change in the Queen's diversions. There were thirteen bears in the inner court of Kenilworth, and "a great sort of ban-dogs" in the outer. They were brought together, and set face to face. "It was a sport," says the coxcomb-historian, "*very pleasant* of these beasts: to see the bear with his pink eyes leering after his enemies' approach, the nimbleness and wait of the dog to take his advantage, and the force and experience of the bear again to avoid the assault: If he was bitten in one place how he would pinch in another to get free; that if he was taken once then what shift, with biting, with clawing, with roaring, tossing, and tumbling, he would work to wind himself from them; and when he was loose, to shake his ears twice or thrice, with the blood and the slaver about his visnomy, was a matter of a *goodly relief*." Oh, Master Laneham, is it you, "always among the gentlewomen by my good will,"—is it you, with your dancing, your gittern, your cittern, your virginals,—your high reaches, your fine feigning, your deep diapason, your wanton warblings, when the ladies flock about you like bees to honey, that can write thus of these cruelties? And truly in this matter of the bears we believe you speak more according to the fashion of the polite than "Cousin Abraham Slender," when he said "Women, indeed, cannot abide 'em." They came into the inner court for the diversion of the Queen and her ladies; they were brought especially from London; the masters of her Majesty's games had the Chamberlain's warrant to travel peaceably with the bears, and to press all ban-dogs that should be needful; they were the lawful tenants of Paris Garden, before the glories of the Globe Theatre, and they divided the town with Hamlet even in that theatre's most palmy days. When the young Shakspere heard the roaring and the barking he knew not that his most obstinate rivals were at their vocation;—rivals that even his friend Alleyn would build his best profits upon in future days, and found a college out of their blood and

slaver. But let us not forget that they were the especial amusements of the town; and that forty years after, the sovereign of a debauched and idle court, although he could enjoy the comedies of Shakspere and the masques of Jonson, is petitioned by Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn for some gratuity, seeing the great diminution of profits they sustain by the restraint against baiting "on the Sundays in the afternoon, after divine service," more particularly on account of "the loss of divers of these beasts, as before the King of Denmark, which lost a goodly bear called George Stone; and at our last being before your Majesty were killed four of our best bears, which in your kingdom are not the like to be had." * Laneham tells us not that the country-folks were recreated with the bears:—"As this sport was held at day-time in the castle, so was there abroad at night very strange and sundry kinds of fireworks."

The bear-tragedy of Thursday was succeeded by the enactment of a most extraordinary farce on Sunday. "After divine service in the parish-church for the Sabbath-day, and a fruitful sermon there in the forenoon," Elizabeth was recreated with a mockery of the simple ceremonials of her people, on one of the most joyful and yet serious occasions of human life. A village-bridal was to be burlesqued—a "merry-marriage," as Gascoigne calls it. A procession was set in order in the tilt-yard to make its show in the Castle before the Great Court. "Sixteen wights, riding-men, and well beseen," and then "the bridegroom foremost in his father's tawny worsted jacket (for his friends were fain that he should be a bridegroom before the Queen), a fair straw hat with a capital crown, steeple-wise on his head; a pair of harvest-gloves on his hands, as a sign of good husbandry; a pen and inkhorn at his back, for he would be known to be bookish; lame of a leg that in his youth was broken at foot-ball; well-beloved of his mother, who lent him a new muffler for a napkin, that was tied to his girdle for losing it. It was no small sport to mark this minion in his full appointment; that, *through good tuition*, became as formal in his action *as had he been a bridegroom indeed.*" Then came the morris-dancers, Maid Marian, and the Fool; bride-maids, "as bright as a breast of bacon, of thirty years old apiece;" a freckled-faced, red-headed lubber with the bride-cup; the "worshipful bride, thirty-five years old, of colour brown-bay, not very beautiful indeed, but ugly, foul, and ill-favoured;" and, lastly, a dozen other damsels "for bride-maids, that for favour, attire, for fashion and cleanliness, were as meet for such a bride as a tureen-ladle for a porridge-pot." We must do Elizabeth the justice to believe that such a mummery was scarcely agreeable to her; it could not have been agreeable to her people. In that Court, as in other Courts, must there have dwelt that heartless exclusiveness which finds subjects for ridicule in what delights the earnest multitudes. Many a bridal procession had gone forth from the happy cottages of Kenilworth to the porch of that old parish-church, amidst song and music, with garlands of rosemary and wheat-ears, parents blessing, sisters smiling in tears; and then the great lord—the heartless lord, as the peasants might whisper, whose innocent wife

* Collier's 'Memoirs of Edward Alleyn,' p. 75.



perished untimely—is to make sport of their homely joys before their Queen. There was, perhaps, one in the crowd on that Sunday afternoon who was to see the very heaven of poetry in such simple rites—who was to picture the shepherd thus addressing his mistress in the solemnity of the troth-plight :—

> "I take thy hand; this hand
> As soft as dove's down, and as white as it;
> Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow
> That's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er." *

He would agree not with Master Lancham—"By my troth 't was a lively pastime: I believe it would have moved a man to a right merry mood, though it had been told him that his wife lay dying." Leicester, as we have seen, had procured abundance of the occasional rhymes of flattery to propitiate Elizabeth. This was enough. Poor Gascoigne had prepared an elaborate masque, in two acts, of Diana and her Nymphs, which for the time is a remarkable production. "This show," says the poet, "was devised and penned by Master Gascoigne, and being prepared and ready (every actor in his garment) two or three days together, yet never came to execution. The cause whereof I cannot attribute to any other thing than to lack of opportunity and seasonable weather." It is easy to understand that there was some other cause of Gascoigne's disappointment. Leicester, perhaps, scarcely dared to set the puppets moving who were to conclude the masque with these lines :—

* Winter's Tale, Act IV., Scene III.

"A world of wealth at will
You henceforth shall enjoy
In wedded state, and therewithal
Hold up from great annoy
The staff of your estate:
O queen, O worthy queen,
Yet never wight felt perfect bliss
But such as wedded been."

But when the Queen laughed at the word marriage, the wily courtier had his impromptu device of the mock bridal. The marriages of the poor were the marriages to be made fun of. But there was a device of marriage at which Diana would weep, and all the other Gods rejoice, when her Majesty should give the word. Alas, for that crowning show there was "lack of opportunity and seasonable weather."

It is difficult to imagine anything more tedious than the fulsome praise, the mythological pedantries, the obscure allusions to Constancy and Deep-Desire, which were poured into the ears of Elizabeth during the nineteen days of Kenilworth. There was not, according to the historians of this visit, one fragment of our real old poetry produced to gratify the Queen of a nation that had the songs and ballads of the chivalrous times still fresh upon its lips. There were no Minstrels at Kenilworth; the Harper was unbidden to its halls. The

[Leicester.]

old English spirit of poetry was dead in a scheming court. We have many evidences besides the complaint of poor Richard Sheale,* that the courtly and the rich had begun to hold the travelling depositaries of the old traditionary lore of England in unwise contempt. A few years after, and they were proscribed by statute:—

> "Beggars they are with one consent,
> And rogues by act of parliament."

Laneham gives an account of "a *ridiculous device* of an ancient minstrel and his song, prepared to have been proffered, if meet time and place had been found for it." This is not the minstrel himself, but a travestie of him. He was "a Squire Minstrel of Middlesex;" and an absurd narrative is put into his mouth of "the worshipful village of Islington, well known to be one of the most ancient and best towns in England next London, at this day." Laneham goes on to describe how "in a worshipful company" the "fool" who was to play the Minstrel was put out of countenance by one cleverer than himself—Mas er Laneham perhaps; and how "he waxed very wayward, eager, and sour." But he was pacified with fair words, and sack and sugar; and after a little warbling on his harp came forth with a "solemn song, warranted for story out of King Arthur's acts, the 1st book and 26th chapter." Percy prints 'The Minstrel's Sonnet' in his 'Reliques,' under the title of 'King Ryence's Challenge,' saying—"This song is more modern than many of them which follow it, but is placed here for the sake of the subject. It was sung before Queen Elizabeth at the grand entertainment at Kenilworth Castle in 1575, and was probably composed for that occasion." Not so. Laneham says expressly, "it was prepared to have been proffered." It is remarkable that Percy does not state what is so evident—that this ballad was intended to be a burlesque upon the Romances of Chivalry. If all Laneham's conceited description of the Minstrel did not show this, the following stanza is decisive enough; being the answer to the messenger of King Ryence, who came to demand, in the language of the 'Morte Arthur,' the beard of the British king, "for king Ryence had purfeled a mantell with kings' beards, and there lacked for one a place in the mantell:"—

> "But say to sir Ryence, thou dwarf, quoth the king,
> That for his bold message I do him defye;
> And shortlye with basins and pans will him ring
> Out of North-Gales: where he and I
> With swords and not razors quickly shall trye
> Whether he or king Arthur will prove the best barber;
> And therewith he shook his good sword Excalibor."

It was something higher that in a few years called up Spenser and Shakspere. Yet there was one sport, emanating from the people, which had heart and reality in it. Laneham describes this as a "good sport presented in an historical cue by certain good-hearted men of Coventry, my lord's neighbours there." They "made petition that they might renew now their old storial show: of argument how the Danes, whilom here in a troublous season, were for

* See Chapter V.

quietness borne withal and suffered in peace; that anon, by outrage and unsupportable insolency, abusing both Ethelred the King, then, and all estates everywhere beside, at the grievous complaint and counsel of Huna, the King's chieftain in wars, on Saint Brice's night, Anno Dom. 1012 (as the book says, that falleth yearly on the thirteenth of November), were all despatched, and the realm rid. And for because that the matter mentioneth how valiantly our Englishwomen, for love of their country, behaved themselves, expressed in action and rhymes after their manner, they thought it might move some mirth to her Majesty the rather. The thing, said they, is grounded in story, and for pastime wont to be played in our city yearly, without ill example of manners, papistry, or any superstition; and else did so occupy the heads of a number, that likely enough would have had worse meditations; had an ancient beginning and a long continuance, till now of late laid down, they knew no cause why, unless it was by the zeal of certain of their preachers, men very commendable for their behaviour and learning, and sweet in their sermons, but somewhat too sour in preaching away their pastime." The description by Laneham is the only precise account which remains to us of the "old storial show," the "sport presented in an historical cue." It was a show not to be despised, for it told the people how their Saxon ancestors had arisen to free themselves from "outrage and unsupportable insolency," and "how valiantly our Englishwomen, for love of their country, behaved themselves." Laneham, in his accustomed style, is more intent upon describing "Captain Cox," an odd man of Coventry, "mason, ale-conner, who hath great oversight in matters of story," than upon giving us a rational account of this spectacle. We find, however, that there were the Danish lance-knights on horseback, and then the English; that they had furious encounters with spear and shield, with sword and target; that there were footmen, who fought in rank and squadron; and that "twice the Danes had the better, but at the last conflict beaten down, overcome, and many led captive for triumph by our Englishwomen." The court historian adds,—"This was the effect of this show, that as it was handled made much matter of good pastime, brought all indeed into the great court, even under her Highness's window, to have seen." But her Highness, having pleasanter occupation within, "saw but little of the Coventry play, and commanded it therefore on the Tuesday following to have it full out, as accordingly it was presented." This repetition of the Hock-play in its completeness, full out, necessarily leads to the conclusion that the action was somewhat more complicated than the mere repetition of a mock-combat. Laneham, in his general description of the play, says, "expressed in action and rhymes." That he has preserved none of the rhymes, and has given us a very insufficient account of the action, is characteristic of the man, and of the tone of the courtiers. The Coventry clowns came there, not to call up any patriotic feeling by their old traditionary rhymes and dumb-show, but to be laughed at for their awkward movement and their earnest declamation. It appears to us that the conclusion is somewhat hasty which says of this play of Hock Tuesday, "It seems to have been merely a dumb-show."* Percy, rest-

* Collier, 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. i., p. 234.

ing upon the authority of Laneham, says that the performance "seems *on that occasion* to have been without recitation or rhymes, and *reduced* to mere dumb-show." Even this we doubt. But certainly it is difficult to arrive at any other conclusion than that of Percy, that the play, as originally performed by the men of Coventry, "expressed in action and rhymes after their manner,"—representing a complicated historical event,—the insolence of tyranny, the indignation of the oppressed, the grievous complaint of one injured chieftain, the secret counsels, the plots, the conflicts, the triumph,—must have offered us "a regular model of a complete drama." If the young Shakspere were a witness to the performance of this drama, his imagination would have been more highly and more worthily excited than if he had been the favoured spectator of all the shows of Tritons, and Dianas, and Ladies of the Lake, that proceeded from "the conceit so deep in casting the plot" of his lordship of Leicester. It would be not too much to believe that this storial show might first suggest to him how English history might be dramatized; how a series of events, terminating in some remarkable catastrophe, might be presented to the eye; how fighting-men might be marshalled on a mimic field; how individual heroism might stand out from amongst the mass, having its own fit expression of thought and passion; how the wife or the mother, the sister or the mistress, might be there to uphold the hero, even as the Englishwomen assisted their warriors; and how all this might be made to move the hearts of the people, as the old ballads had once moved them. Such a result would have repaid a visit to Kenilworth by William Shakspere. Without this, he, his father, and their friends, might have retired from the scene of Dudley's magnificence, as most thinking persons in all probability retired, with little satisfaction. There was lavish expense; but according to the most credible accounts, the possessor of Kenilworth was the oppressor of his district. We see him not delighting to show his Queen a happy tenantry, such as the less haughty and ambitious nobles and esquires were anxious to cultivate. The people come under the windows of Elizabeth as objects of ridicule. Slavish homage would be there to Leicester from the gentlemen of the county. They would replenish his butteries with their gifts, they would ride upon his errands; they would wear his livery. There was one gentleman in Warwickshire who would not thus do Leicester homage—Edward Arden, the head of the great house of Arden, the cousin of William Shakspere's mother. But the mighty favourite was too powerful for him: "Which Edward though a gentleman not inferior to the rest of his ancestors in those virtues wherewith they were adorned, had the hard hap to come to an untimely death in 27 Eliz., the charge laid against him being no less than high treason against the Queen, as privy to some foul intentions that Master Somerville, his son-in-law (a Roman Catholic), had towards her person: For which he was prosecuted with so great rigour and violence, by the Earl of Leicester's means, whom he had irritated in some particulars (as I have credibly heard), partly in disdaining to wear his livery, which many in this country, of his rank, thought, in those days, no small honour to them; but chiefly for galling him by certain harsh expressions, touching his private accesses to the Countess of Essex before she

was his wife; that through the testimony of one Hall, a priest, he was found guilty of the fact, and lost his life in Smithfield."* The Rev. N. J. Halpin, who has contributed a most interesting tract to the publications of 'The Shakespeare Society' on the subject of 'Oberon's Vision in the Midsummer Night's Dream,' has explained the allusions in that exquisite passage with far more success than the belief of Warburton that the Queen of Scots was pointed at, or of Mr. Boaden that Amy Robsart was the "little western flower." He considers that Edward Arden, a spectator of those very entertainments at Kenilworth, discovered Leicester's guilty "accesses to the Countess of Essex;" that the expression of Oberon, "That *very time*, I saw, but thou couldst not," referred to this discovery; that when "the Imperial Votaress passed on," he "marked where the bolt of Cupid fell;" that "the little western flower," pure, "milk-white" before that time, became spotted, "purple with love's wound." We may add that there is bitter satire in what follows—"that flower," retaining the original influence, "will make or man or woman madly dote," as Lettice, Countess of Essex, was infatuated by Leicester. The discovery of Edward Arden, and his "harsh expressions" concerning it, might be traditions in Shakspere's family, and be safely allegorized by the poet in 1594 when Leicester was gone to his account.†

Laneham asks a question which in his giddy style he does not wait to answer, or even to complete:—"And first, who that considers unto the stately seat of Kenilworth Castle, the rare beauty of building that his Honour hath advanced, all of the hard quarry-stone; every room so spacious, so well be-

* Dugdale's Warwickshire,' p. 681.

† Professor Craik, in his most interesting work, 'The Romance of the Peerage,' is of opinion that no reader who shall come to the perusal of Mr. Halpin's Essay, with a mind free from prepossessions and a sufficient knowledge of the time, "will retain any doubt that the secret meaning of these lines has now been discovered—that Cupid is Leicester, that the Moon and the Vestal typify Elizabeth, that the Earth is the Lady Sheffield, and the little western flower the Countess of Essex." (Vol. i. p. 75.)

[Ruins of Kenilworth, in the 17th century.]

lighted, and so high roofed within; so seemly to sight by due proportion without; in day-time on every side so glittering by glass; at nights, by continual brightness of candle, fire, and torch-light, transparent through the lightsome windows, as it were the Egyptian Pharos relucent unto all the Alexandrian coast,"—who that considers (we finish the sentence) what Kenilworth thus was in the year 1575 will not contrast it with its present state of complete ruin? Never did a fabric of such unequalled strength and splendour perish so ingloriously. Leicester bequeathed the possession to his brother the Earl of Warwick for life, and the inheritance to his only son, Sir Robert Dudley, whose legitimacy was to be left doubtful. The rapacious James contrived, through the agency of the widow of the Earl of Leicester, to cheat the son out of the father's great possessions. The more generous Prince Henry, upon whom Kenilworth was bestowed, negotiated for its purchase with Sir Robert Dudley, who had gone abroad. A fifth only of the purchase-money was ever paid; yet upon the death of his brother, Charles took possession of the castle as his heir. A stronger than Charles divided the castle and lands, thus unjustly procured by the Crown, amongst his captains and counsellors; and from the time of Cromwell the history of Kenilworth is that of its gradual decay

[Entrance to the Hall.]

and final ruin. No cannon has battered its strong walls, "in many places of fifteen and ten foot thickness;" no turbulent soldiery has torn down the hangings and destroyed the architraves and carved ceilings of "the rooms of great state within the same;" no mines have exploded in its "stately cellars, all carried upon pillars and architecture of freestone carved and wrought." The buildings were whole, and are described, as we have just quoted, in a survey when James laid his hand upon them. Of many of the outer walls the masonry is still as fresh and as perfect as if the stone had only been quarried half a century ago. Silent decay has done all this work. The proud Leicester, who would have been king in England, could not secure his rightful inheritance to his son, undoubtedly legitimate, whom he had the baseness to disown whilst he was living. No just possessor came after him. One rapacity succeeded another, so that even a century ago Kenilworth was a monument of the worthlessness of a grovelling ambition.

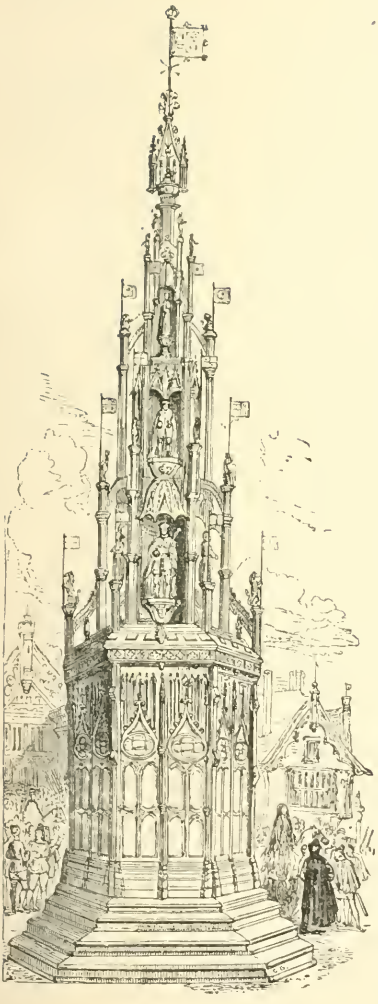
The historian of Warwickshire has given us "the ground-plot of Kenilworth Castle," as it was in 1640. By this we may trace the pool and the pleasance; the inner court, the base court, and the tilt-yard; Cæsar's Tower and Mortimer's Tower; King Henry's Lodgings and Leicester's Buildings; the Hall, the Presence Chamber, and the Privy Chamber. There was an old fresco painting, too, upon a wall at Newnham Padox, which was copied in 1716, and is held to represent the castle in the time of James I. Without these aids Kenilworth would only appear to us a mysterious mass of ruined gigantic walls; deep cavities whose uses are unknown; arched doorways, separated from the chambers to which they led; narrow staircases, suddenly opening into magnificent recesses, with their oriels looking over corn-field and pasture; a hall with its lofty windows and its massive chimney-pieces still entire, but without roof or flooring; mounds of earth in the midst of walled chambers, and the hawthorn growing where the dais stood. The desolation would probably have gone on for another century; the stones of Kenilworth would still have mended roads, and been built into the cowshed and the cottage, till the ploughshare had been carried over the grassy courts; had not, some twenty-five years ago, a man of middle age, with a lofty forehead and a keen grey eye, slightly lame but withal active, entered its gatehouse, and, having looked upon the only bit of carving left to tell something of interior magnificence, passed into those ruins, and stood there silent for some two hours.* Then was the ruined place henceforward to be sanctified. The progress of desolation was to be arrested. The torch of genius again lighted up "every room so spacious," and they were for ever after to be associated with the recollections of their ancient splendour. There were to be visions of sorrow and suffering there too; woman's weakness, man's treachery. And now Kenilworth is worthily a place which is visited from all lands. The solitary artist sits on

* Some five and twenty years ago there was a venerable and intelligent farmer, Mr. Bodington, living in the Gatehouse at Kenilworth. He remembered Scott's visit, although he knew not at the time of the visit who he was; and the frank manners and keen inquiries of the great novelist left an impression upon him which he described to us. The old man is dead.

the stone seat of the great bay-window, and sketches the hall where he fancies Elizabeth banqueting. A knot of young antiquarians, ascending a narrow staircase, would identify the turret as that in which Amy Robsart took refuge. Happy children run up and down the grassy slopes, and wonder who made so pretty a ruin. The contemplative man rejoices that the ever-vivifying power of nature throws its green mantle over what would be ugly in decay; and that, in the same way, the poetical power invests the desolate places with life and beauty, and, when the material creations of ambition lie perishing, builds them up again, not to be again destroyed.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGEANTS.



It is "the middle summer's spring." On the day before the feast of Corpus Christi all the roads leading to Coventry have far more than their accustomed share of pedestrians and horsemen. The pageants are to be acted to-morrow, and perhaps for the last time. The preachers in their sermons have denounced them again and again; but since the Queen's Majesty was graciously pleased with the Hock-play at Kenilworth, that ancient sport, so dear to the men of Coventry, has been revived, and the Guilds have struggled against the preachers to prevent their old pageants from being suppressed. And why, say they, should they be suppressed? Have not they, the men of the Guilds, been accustomed to act their own pageants long after the Grey Friars had gone into obscurity? Has not the good city all that is needful for their proper performance? Do not they all know their parts, as arranged by the town-clerk? Are not their robes in goodly order, some new, and all untattered? Moreover, is not the trade of the city greatly declined—its blue thread thrust out by thread brought from beyond sea—its caps and girdles superseded by gear from London;* and was not in the old time "the confluence of people from far and near to see this show extraordinary great, and yielded no small advantage to this city?"† The pageants shall be played in spite of the preachers; and so the bruit thereof goes through the country, and Coventry is still to see its accustomed crowds on the day of Corpus Christi.

* See 'A Briefe Conceipte of English Pollicye,' 1581. † Dugdale.

It requires not the imagination of the romance-writer to assume that before William Shakspere was sixteen, that is, before the year 1580, when the pageants at Coventry, with one or two rare exceptions, were finally suppressed, he would be a spectator of one of these remarkable performances, which were in a few years wholly to perish; becoming, however, the foundations of a drama more suited to the altered spirit of the people, more universal in its range,—the drama of the laity, and not of the church. What a glorious city must Coventry have been in the days when that youth first looked upon it—the "Prince's Chamber," as it was called, the "third city of the realm," a "shire-town," * full of stately buildings of great antiquity, unequalled once in the splendour of its monastic institutions, full of associations of regal state, and chivalry, and high events! As he finally emerges from the rich woodlands and the elm-groves which reach from Kenilworth, there would that splendid city lie before him, surrounded by its high wall and its numerous gates, its three wondrous spires, which he had often gazed upon from the hill of Welcombe, rising up in matchless height and symmetry, its famous cross towering above the gabled roofs. At the other extremity of the wall, gates more massive and defying—a place of strength, even though no conqueror of Cressy now dwelt therein—a place of magnificence, though the hand of spoliation had been there most busy. William Shakspere and his company ride through the gate of the Grey Friars, and they are presently in the heart of that city. Eager crowding is there already in these streets on that eve of Corpus Christi, for the waits are playing, and banners are hung out at the walls of the different Guilds. The citizens gathered round the Cross are eagerly discussing the particulars of to-morrow's show. Here and there one with a beetling brow indignantly denounces the superstitious and papistical observance; whilst the laughing smith or shearman, who is to play one of the magi on the morrow, describes the bravery of his new robe and the lustre of his pasteboard crown that has been fresh gilded. The inns are full, "great and sumptuous inns," as Harrison describes those of this very day, "able to lodge two hundred or three hundred persons, and their horses, at ease, and thereto, with a very short warning, make such provision for their diet as to him that is unacquainted withal may seem to be incredible: And it is a world to see how each owner of them contendeth with other for goodness of entertainment of their guests, as about fineness and change of linen, furniture of bedding, beauty of rooms, service at the table, costliness of plate, strength of drink, variety of wines, or well using of horses." So there would be no lack of cheer; and the hundreds that have come into Coventry will be fed and lodged better even than in London, whose inns, as the same authority tells us, are the worst in the kingdom. Piping and dancing is there in the chambers, madrigals worth the listening. But silence and sleep at last fitly prepare for a busy day. Perhaps, however, a stray minstrel might find his way to this solemnity, and forget the hour in the exercise of his vocation, like the very ancient anonymous poet of the Alliterative Metre, whose manuscript, probably of the date of Henry V., has contrived to escape destruction:—

* Coventry has altogether separate jurisdiction. It is "the County of the City of Coventry." It is called "a shire-town" by Dugdale, to mark this distinction.

"Ones y me ordayned, as y have ofte doon,
With frendes, and felawes, frendemen, and other;
And caught me in a company on Corpus Christi even,
Six, other seven myle, oute of Suthampton,
To take melodye, and mirthes, among my makes;
With redyng of romaunces, and revelyng among,
The dym of the darknesse drowe into the west,
And began for to spryng in the grey day."*

Perhaps the inquiring youth from Stratford would meet with some old Coventry man, who would describe the pageants as they were acted by the Grey Friars before the dissolution of their religious house. The old man would tell him how these pageants, "acted with mighty state and reverence by the friars of this house, had theatres for the several scenes, very large and high, placed upon wheels, and drawn to all the eminent parts of the city for the better advantage of spectators; and contained the story of the New Testament composed into old English rhyme, as appeareth by an ancient manuscript, entitled *Ludus Corporis Christi*, or *Ludus Coventriæ*."† That ancient man, who might have been a friar himself, but felt it not safe to proclaim his vocation, might describe how Henry V. and his nobles took great delight in seeing the pageants; how Queen Margaret in the days of her prosperity came from Kenilworth to Coventry privily to see the play, and saw all the pageants played save one, which could not be played because night drew on; how the triumphant Richard III. came to see the Corpus Christi plays; and how Henry VII. much commended them.‡ He could recite lines from these Corpus Christi plays with a reverential solemnity; lines that for the most part sounded rude in the ear of that youth, but which, nevertheless, had a vigorous simplicity, fit for the teaching of an uninstructed people. He would tell how in the play of 'The Creation' the pride of Lucifer disdained the worship of the angels, and how he was cast down—

"With mirth and joy never more to mell."

How in the play of 'The Fall,' Eve sang—

"In this garden I will go see
All the flowers of fair beauty,
And tasten the fruits of great plenty
That be in Paradise;"

and how the first pair lost that garden, and went forth into the land to labour. He could repeat, too, a hymn of Abel, very sweet in its music:—

"Almighty God, and full of might,
By whom all thing is made of nought,
To thee my heart is ready dight,
For upon thee is all my thought."

Moreover, in the play of 'Noah,' when the dove returned to the ark with the

* See Percy's 'Reliques:' On the Alliterative Metre. We give the lines as corrected in Sharp's 'Coventry Mysteries.'

† Dugdale.

‡ See Sharp's quotations from the manuscript Annals of Coventry, 'Dissertation,' p. 4.

olive-branch, there was a joyful chorus, such as now could never be heard in the streets of Coventry:—

"Mare vidit et fugit,
Jordanis conversus est retrorsum.
Non nobis, Domine, non nobis,
Sed nomini tuo da gloriam."

Much more would he have told of those ancient plays, forty-three in number, but time would not.* He defended the objects for which they were instituted: the general spread of knowledge might have brought other teaching, but they familiarized the people with the great scriptural truths; they gave them amusements of a higher nature than military games, and contentions of mere brute force. They might be improved, and something like the drama of Greece and Rome might be founded upon them. But now the same class of subjects were to be handled by rude artificers, who would make them ridiculous. There was much truth in what the old man said; and the youth of Stratford would go thoughtfully to rest.

The morning of Corpus Christi comes, and soon after sunrise there is stir in the streets of Coventry. The old ordinances for this solemnity require that the Guilds should be at their posts at five o'clock. There is to be a solemn procession—formerly, indeed, after the performance of the pageant—and then, with hundreds of torches burning around the figures of our Lady and St. John, candlesticks and chalices of silver, banners of velvet and canopies of silk, and the members of the Trinity Guild and the Corpus Christi Guild bearing their crucifixes and candlesticks, with personations of the angel Gabriel lifting up the lily, the twelve apostles, and renowned virgins, especially St. Catherine and St. Margaret. The Reformation has, of course, destroyed much of this ceremonial; and, indeed, the spirit of it has in great part evaporated. But now, issuing from the many ways that lead to the cross, there is heard the melody of harpers and the voice of minstrelsy; trumpets sound, banners wave, riding-men come thick from their several halls; the mayor and aldermen in their robes, the city servants in proper liveries, St. George and the Dragon, and Herod on horseback. The bells ring, boughs are strewed in the streets, tapestry is hung out of the windows, officers in scarlet coats struggle in the crowd while the procession is marshalling. The crafts are getting into their ancient order, each craft with its streamer and its men in harness. There are "Fysshers and Cokes,—Baxters and Milners,—Bochers,—Whittawers and Glovers,—Pynners, Tylers, and Wrightes,— Skynners, — Barkers, — Corvysers, — Smythes, — Wevers, — Wirdrawers,—Cardemakers, Sadelers, Peyntours, and Masons,—Gurdelers,—Taylours, Walkers, and Sherman,—Deysters,—Drapers,—Mercers."† At length the procession is arranged. It parades through the principal lines of the city, from Bishopgate on the north to the Grey Friars' Gate on the south, and from Broadgate on the west to Gosford Gate on the east. The crowd is thronging to the wide area on the north of Trinity Church and St. Michael's, for there is

* See the 'Ludus Coventriæ,' published by the Shakespeare Society.
† Sharp's 'Dissertation,' page 160.

[Coventry Churches and Pageants.]

the pageant to be first performed. There was a high house or carriage which stood upon six wheels; it was divided into two rooms, one above the other. In the lower room were the performers; the upper was the stage. This ponderous vehicle was painted and gilt, surmounted with burnished vanes and streamers, and decorated with imagery; it was hung round with curtains, and a painted cloth presented a picture of the subject that was to be performed. This simple stage had its machinery, too; it was fitted for the representation of an earthquake or a storm; and the pageant in most cases was concluded in the noise and flame of fireworks. It is the pageant of the company of Shearmen and Tailors which is now to be performed,—the subject of the Birth of Christ and Offering of the Magi, with the Flight into Egypt and Murder of the Innocents. The eager multitudes are permitted to crowd within a reasonable distance of the car. There is a moveable scaffold erected for the more distinguished spec-

tators. The men of the Guilds sit firm on their horses. Amidst the sound of harp and trumpet the curtains are withdrawn, and Isaiah appears, prophesying the blessing which is to come upon the earth. Gabriel announces to Mary the embassage upon which he is sent from Heaven. Then a dialogue between Mary and Joseph, and the scene changes to the field where shepherds are abiding in the darkness of the night—a night so dark that they know not where their sheep may be; they are cold and in great heaviness. Then the star shines, and they hear the song of "Gloria in excelsis Deo." A soft melody of concealed music hushes even the whispers of the Coventry audience; and three songs are sung, such as may abide in the remembrance of the people, and be repeated by them at their Christmas festivals. "The first the shepherds sing:"—

"As I rode out this enders* night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,
And all about their fold a star shone bright;
They sang terli terlow:
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow."

There is then a song "the women sing:"—

"Lully, lulla, you little tiny child:
By, by, lully, lullay, you little tiny child:
By, by, lully, lullay.
O sisters two, how may we do
For to preserve this day
This poor youngling, for whom we do sing
By, by, lully, lullay?

Herod the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All young children to slay.

That woe is me, poor child, for thee,
And ever mourn and say,
For thy parting neither say nor sing
By, by, lully, lullay."

The shepherds again take up the song:—

"Down from heaven, from heaven so high,
Of angels there came a great company,
With mirth, and joy, and great solemnity:
They sang terly, terlow:
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow."

The simple melody of these songs has come down to us; they are part songs, each having the treble, the tenor, and the bass.† The star conducts the shepherds to the "crib of poor repast," where the child lies; and, with a simplicity which

* *Enders night*—last night.

† This very curious Pageant, essentially different from the same portion of Scripture-history in the '*Ludus Coventriæ*,' is printed entire in Mr. Sharp's Dissertation,' as well as the score of these songs.

is highly characteristic, one presents the child his pipe, the second his hat, and the third his mittens. Prophets now come, who declare in lengthened rhyme the wonder and the blessing :—

"Neither in halls nor yet in bowers
Born would he not be,
Neither in castles nor yet in towers
That seemly were to see."

The messenger of Herod succeeds ; and very curious it is, and characteristic of a period when the king's laws were delivered in the language of the Conqueror, that he speaks in French. This circumstance would carry back the date of the play to the reign of Edward III., though the language is occasionally modernized. We have then the three kings with their gifts. They are brought before Herod, who treats them courteously, but is inexorable in his cruel decree. Herod rages in the streets ; but the flight into Egypt takes place, and then the massacre. The address of the women to the pitiless soldiers, imploring, defying, is not the least curious part of the performance ; for example—

"Sir knightes, of your courtesy,
This day shame not your chivalry,
But on my child have pity,"

is the mild address of one mother. Another raves—

"He that slays my child in sight,
If that my strokes on him may light,
Be he squire or knight,
I hold him but lost."

The fury of a third is more excessive :—

"Sit he never so high in saddle,
But I shall make his brains addle,
And here with my pot ladle
With him will I fight."

We have little doubt that he who described the horrors of a siege,—

"Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confus'd
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen," *—

had heard the howlings of the women in the Coventry pageant. And so "*fynes lude de taylars and scharmen.*"

The pageants thus performed by the Guilds of Coventry were of various subjects, but all scriptural. The Smiths' pageant was the Crucifixion ; and most curious are their accounts, from 1449 till the time of which we are speaking, for expenses of helmets for Herod and cloaks for Pilate ; of tabards for Caiaphas

* Henry V., Act III., Scene III.

and gear for Pilate's wife; of a staff for the Demon, and a beard for Judas There are payments, too, to a man for hanging Judas and for cock-crowing. The subject of the Cappers' pageant was the Resurrection. They have charges for making the play-book and pricking the songs; for money spent at the first rehearsal and the second rehearsal; for supper on the play-day, for breakfasts and for dinners. The subject of the Drapers' pageant was that of Doomsday; and one of their articles of machinery sufficiently explains the character of their performance—"A link to set the world on fire," following "Paid for the barrel for the earthquake." We may readily believe that the time was fast approaching when such pageants would no longer be tolerated. It is more than probable that the performances of the Guilds were originally subordinate to those of the Grey Friars; perhaps devised and supported by the parochial clergy.* But when the Church became opposed to such representations—when, indeed, they were incompatible with the spirit of the age—it is clear that the efforts of the laity to uphold them could not long be successful. They would be certainly performed without the reverence which once belonged to them. Their rude action and simple language would be ridiculed; and when the feeling of ridicule crept in, their nature would be altered, and they would become essentially profane. There is a very curious circumstance connected with the Coventry pageants which shows the struggle that was made to keep the dramatic spirit of the people in this direction. In 1584 the Smiths performed, after many preparations and rehearsals, a new pageant, the Destruction of Jerusalem. The Smiths applied to one who had been educated in their own town, in the Free School of Coventry, and who in 1584 belonged to St. John's, Oxford, to write this new play for them. The following entry appears in the city accounts:—

"Paid to Mr Smythe of Oxford the xv^th^ daye of aprill 1584 for hys paynes for writing of the tragedye—xiij^l^, vj^s^, viij^d^."

We regret that this play, so liberally paid for when compared with subsequent payments to the Jonsons and Dekkers of the true drama, has not been preserved. It would be curious to contrast it with the beautiful dramatic poem on the same subject, by an accomplished scholar of our own day, also a member of the University of Oxford. But the list of characters remains, which shows that the play was essentially historical, exhibiting the contests of the Jewish factions as described by Josephus. The accounts manifest that the play was got up with great magnificence in 1584; but it was not played again till 1591, when it was once more performed along with the famous Hock Tuesday. It was then ordered that no other plays whatever should be performed; and the same order, which makes this concession "at the request of the Commons," directs "that all the May-poles that now are standing in this city shall be taken down before Whitsunday next, and none hereafter to be set up." In that year Coventry saw the last of its pageants. But Marlowe and Shakspere were in London, building up something more adapted to that age; more universal: dramas that

* It is clear, we think, that the pageants performed by the Guilds were altogether different from the 'Ludus Coventriæ,' which Dugdale expressly tells us were performed by the Grey Friars.

no change of manners or of politics can destroy. The Pageants of Coventry have perished, as her strong gates and walls have perished. They belonged essentially to other times. They are no longer needed. A few fragments remain to tell us what they were; and upon these the learned, as they are called, will doubt and differ, and the general world heed them not.

And now the men of Coventry lead the way of the strangers to another spot, with the cry of "The Hock-play, the Hock-play!" There was yawning and ill-repressed laughing during the pageant, but the whole population now seems animated with the spirit of joyfulness. As one of the worthy aldermen gallantly presses his horse through the crowd, is there not a cry, too, of "A Nycklyn, a Nycklyn!" for did not the worthy mayor, Thomas Nycklyn, three years ago, cause "Hock Tuesday, whereby is mentioned an overthrow of the Danes by the inhabitants of this city, to be again set up and showed forth, to his great commendation and the city's great commodity?"* In the wide area of the Cross-cheaping is the crowd now assembled. The strangers gaze upon "that stately Cross, being one of the chief things wherein this city most glories, which for workmanship and beauty is inferior to none in England."† It was not then venerable for antiquity, for it had been completed little more than thirty years; but it was a wondrous work of gorgeous architecture, story rising above story, with canopies and statues, to a magnificent height, glittering with vanes upon its pinnacles, and now decorated with numerous streamers.‡ Around the square are houses of most picturesque form; the balconies of their principal floors filled with gazers, and the windows immediately beneath the high-pitched roofs showing as many heads as could be thrust through the open casements. The area is cleared, for the play requires no scaffold. The English and the Danes marshal on opposite sides. There are fierce words and imprecations, shouts of defiance, whisperings of counsel. What is imperfectly heard or ill understood by the strangers is explained by those who are familiar with the show. There is no ridicule now; no laughing at Captain Cox, in his velvet cap, and flourishing his tonsword; all is gravity and exultation. Then come the women of Coventry, ardent in the cause of liberty, courageous, much enduring; and some one tells in the pauses of the play, how there once rode into that square, in a death-like solitude and silence, a lady all naked, who, "bearing an extraordinary affection for this place, often and earnestly besought her husband that he would free it from that grievous servitude whereunto it was subject;"§ and he telling her the hard conditions upon which her prayer would be granted—

"She rode forth, clothed on with chastity."

* Extract from manuscript Annals of Coventry in Sharp's 'Dissertation,' p. 129.

† Dugdale.

‡ The Cross has perished, not through age, but by the hands of Common-councilmen and Commissioners of Pavement. The Turks broke up the Elgin marbles to make mortar for their Athenian hovels, and we call *them* barbarians. These things went on amongst us up to a very recent time. In an old Chapel of Ease in the neighbourhood of Stratford was, a few years ago, one of the very fine recumbent figures of a Templar. The figure was missed by a clergyman who sometimes visited the place, and he asked the sexton what had become of it? The answer was, "What! that cross legged chap? Oh! I mended the road wi' he; a saved a deal o' limestone."

§ Dugdale.

Noble-hearted women such as the Lady Godiva were those of Coventry who assisted their husbands to drive out the Danes; and there they lead their captives in triumph; and the Hock-play terminates with song and chorus.

But the solemnities of the day are not yet concluded. In the space around Swine Cross, and near St. John's School, is another scaffold erected; not a lofty scaffold like that of the drapers and shearmen, but gay with painted cloths and ribbons. The pageant of 'The Nine Worthies' is to be performed by the dramatic body of the Grammar School; the ancient pageant, such as was presented to Henry VI. and his Queen in 1455, and of which the Leet-book contains the faithful copy.* Assuredly there was one who witnessed that performance carefully employed in noting down the lofty speeches which the three Hebrews, Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabæus; the three Infidels, Hector, Alexander, and Julius Cæsar; and the three Christians, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Boulogne, uttered on that occasion. In the Coventry pageant Hector thus speaks:—

> "Most pleasant princes, recorded that may be,
> I, Hector of Troy, that am chief conqueror,
> Lowly will obey you, and kneel on my knee."

And Alexander thus:—

> "I, Alexander, that for chivalry beareth the ball,
> Most courageous in conquest through the world am I named,—
> Welcome you, princes."

And Julius Cæsar thus:—

> "I, Julius Cæsar, sovereign of knighthood
> And emperor of mortal men, most high and mighty,
> Welcome you, princes most benign and good."

Surely it was little less than plagiary, if it were not meant for downright parody, when, in a pageant of 'The Nine Worthies' presented a few years after, Hector comes in to say—

> "The armipotent Mars, of lances the almighty,
> Gave Hector a gift, the heir of Ilion:
> A man so breath'd, that certain he would fight, yea,
> From morn till night, out of his pavilion.
> I am that flower."

And Alexander:—

> "When in the world I liv'd, I was the world's commander;
> By east, west, north, and south, I spread my conquering might:
> My 'scutcheon plain declares that I am Alisander."

And Pompey, usurping the just honours of his triumphant rival:—

> "I Pompey am, Pompey surnamed the great,
> That oft in field, with targe and shield, did make my foe to sweat."

* Sharp, page 145.

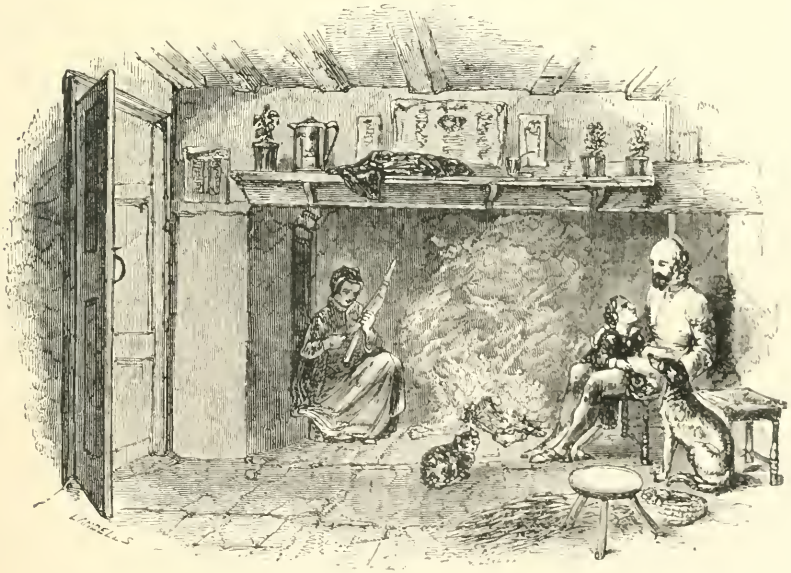
Ranging over the whole dramatic works of Shakspere, whenever we find a classical image or allusion, such as in Hamlet,—

> "A station like the herald Mercury,
> New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,"—

the management of the idea is always elegant and graceful; and the passage may sustain a contrast with the most refined imitations of his contemporaries, or of his own imitator, Milton. In his Roman plays he appears co-existent with his wonderful characters, and to have read all the obscure pages of Roman history with a clearer eye than philosopher or historian. When he employs Latinisms in the construction of his sentences, and even in the creation of new words, he does so with singular facility and unerring correctness. And then, we are to be told, he managed all this by studying bad translations, and by copying extracts from grammars and dictionaries; as if it was reserved for such miracles of talent and industry as the Farmers and the Steevenses to read Ovid and Virgil in their original tongues, whilst the dull Shakspere, whether schoolboy or adult, was to be contented through life with the miserable translations of Arthur Golding and Thomas Phaer.* We believe that his familiarity at least with the best Roman writers was begun early, and continued late; and that he, of all boys of Stratford, would be the least likely to discredit the teaching of Thomas Hunt and Thomas Jenkins, the masters of the grammar-school from 1572 till 1580.

The happy days of boyhood are nearly over. William Shakspere no longer looks for the close of the day when, in that humble chamber in Henley Street, his father shall hear something of his school progress, and read with him some

* See a series of learned and spirited papers by Dr. Maginn on Farmer's Essay, printed in Frazer's Magazine. 1839.



NOTE ON THE COVENTRY PAGEANTS.

THE "Chester Mysteries," which appear greatly to have resembled those of Coventry, were finally suppressed in 1574. Archdeacon Rogers, who in his MSS. rejoices that "such a cloud of ignorance" would be no more seen, appears to have been an eye-witness of their performance, of which he has left the following description:—(See Markland's 'Introduction to a Specimen of the Chester Mysteries.')

"Now of the playes of Chester, called the Whitson playes, when the weare played, and what occupations bringe forthe at theire charges the playes or pagiantes.

"Heare note that these playes of Chester, called the Whitson playes, weare the worke of one Rondell, a Moncke of the Abbaye of Sainte Warburghe in Chester, who redused the whole historye of the bible into englishe storyes in metter in the englishe tounge; and this Monke, in a good desire to doe good, published the same. Then the firste maior of Chester, namely, Sr John Arnewaye, Knighte, he caused the same to be played: the māner of which playes was thus:—they weare divided into 24 pagiantes according to the cōpanyes of the Cittie; and every companye broughte forthe theire pagiant, wch was the cariage or place wch the played in; and before these playes weare played, there was a man wch did ride, as I take it, upon St Georges daye throughe the Cittie, and there published the tyme and the matter of the plays in breefe: the weare played upon Mondaye, Tuesday, and Wensedaye in Whitson weeke. And thei first beganne at the Abbaye gates; and when the firste pagiante was played at the Abbaye gates, then it was wheled from thense to the Pentice, at the hyghe Crosse, before the maior, and before that was donne the seconde came; and the firste went into the Watergate Streete, and from thense unto Bridge Streete, and so one after an other 'till all the pagiantes weare played appoynted for the firste daye, and so likewise for the seconde and the thirde daye. These pagiantes or carige was a hyghe place made like a howse with 2 rowmes, beinge open on the tope; the lower rowme theie apparrelled and dressed themselves, and the higher rowme theie played, and theie stoode upon vi wheeles; and when the had donne with one cariage in one place theie wheled the same from one streete to another, first from the Abbaye gate to the pentise, then to the Watergate streete, then to the bridge streete through the lanes, and so to the este gate streete: and thus tha came from one streete to another, kepinge a directe order in everye streete, for before thei firste carige was gone from one place the seconde came, and so before the seconde was gone the thirde came, and so till the laste was donne all in order withoute anye stayeinge in anye place, for worde beinge broughte howe every place was neere doone, the came and made no place to tarye tell the laste was played."

[Stratford Church, and Mill. From an original drawing at the beginning of the last Century.]

CHAPTER IX.

HOME.

We have thus endeavoured to fill up, with some imperfect forms and feeble colours, the very meagre outline which exists of the schoolboy life of William Shakspere. He is now, we will assume, of the age of fourteen—the year 1578; a year which has been held to furnish decisive evidence as to the worldly condition of his father and his family. The first who attempted to write 'Some Account of the Life of William Shakspeare,' Rowe, says, "His father, who was a considerable dealer in wool, had so large a family, ten children in all, that, though he was his eldest son, he could give him no better education than his own employment. He had bred him, it is true, for some time at a free-school, where, it is probable, he acquired what Latin he was master of: but the narrowness of his circumstances, and the want of his assistance at home, forced his father to withdraw him from thence, and unhappily prevented his further proficiency in that language." This statement, be it remembered, was written one hundred and thirty years after the event which it professes to record—the early removal of William Shakspere from the free-school to which he had been sent by his father. We have no hesitation in saying that the statement is manifestly based upon two assumptions, both of which are incorrect:—The first, that his father had a large family of ten children, and was so narrowed in his circumstances that he could not spare even the *time* of his eldest son, he being taught for nothing; and, secondly, that the son, by his early removal from the school where he acquired "what Latin he was master of," was pre-

vented attaining a "proficiency in that language," his works manifesting "an ignorance of the ancients." It may be convenient that we should in this place endeavour to dispose of both these assertions. Mr. Halliwell, commenting upon this statement, says, "John Shakspeare's circumstances began to fail him when William was about fourteen, and he then withdrew him from the grammar-school, for the purpose of obtaining his assistance in his agricultural pursuits." Was fourteen an unusually early age for a boy to be removed from a grammar-school? We think not, at a period when there were boy-bachelors at the Universities. If he had been taken from the school three years before, when he was eleven,—certainly an early age,—we should have seen his father then recorded, in 1575, as the purchaser of two freehold houses in Henley Street, and the "narrowness of his circumstances" as the reason of Shakspere's "no better proficiency," would have been at once exploded. In his material allegation Rowe utterly fails.

The family of John Shakspere did not consist, as we have already shown, of ten children. In the year 1578, when the school education of William may be reasonably supposed to have terminated, and before which period his "assistance at home" would rather have been embarrassing than useful to his father, the family consisted of five children: William, aged fourteen; Gilbert, twelve; Joan, nine; Anne, seven; and Richard four. Anne died early in the following year; and, in 1580, Edmund, the youngest child, was born; so that the family never exceeded five living at the same time. But still the circumstances of John Shakspere, even with five children, might have been straitened. The assertion of Rowe excited the persevering diligence of Malone; and he has collected together a series of documents from which he infers, or leaves the reader to infer, that John Shakspere and his family gradually sunk from their station of respectability at Stratford into the depths of poverty and ruin. The sixth section of Malone's posthumous 'Life' is devoted to a consideration of this subject. It thus commences: "The manufacture of gloves, which was, at this period, a very flourishing one, both at Stratford and Worcester (in which latter city it is still carried on with great success), however generally beneficial, should seem, from whatever cause, to have afforded our poet's father but a scanty maintenance." The assumption that John Shakspere depended for his "maintenance" upon "the manufacture of gloves" rests entirely and absolutely upon one solitary entry in the books of the bailiff's court at Stratford. In Chapter II. we have endeavoured to show to what extent, and in what manner, John Shakspere was a glover. Glover or not, he was a landed proprietor and an occupier of land in 1578.

We proceed to the decisive statement of Malone that "when our author was about fourteen years old," the "distressed situation" of his father was evident: it rests "upon surer grounds than conjecture." The Corporation books have shown that on particular occasions, such as the visitation of the plague in 1564, John Shakspere contributed like others to the relief of the poor; but now, in January, 1577-8, he is taxed for the necessities of the borough only to pay half what other aldermen pay; and in November of the same year, whilst other aldermen are assessed fourpence weekly towards the relief of the poor, John Shakspere "shall not be taxed to pay anything." In 1579 the sum levied upon

him for providing soldiers at the charge of the borough is returned, amongst similar sums of other persons, as "unpaid and unaccounted for." Finally, this unquestionable evidence of the books of the borough shows that this merciful forbearance of his brother townsmen was unavailing; for, in an action brought against him in the bailiff's court in the year 1586, he during these seven years having gone on from bad to worse, the return by the serjeants at mace upon a warrant of distress is, that John Shakspere has nothing upon which distress can be levied.* There are other corroborative proofs of John Shakspere's poverty at this period brought forward by Malone. In this precise year, 1578, he mortgages his wife's inheritance of Asbies to Edmund Lambert for forty pounds; and, in the same year, the will of Mr. Roger Sadler, of Stratford, to which is subjoined a list of debts due to him, shows that John Shakspere was indebted to him five pounds, for which sum Edmund Lambert was a security,—"By which," says Malone, "it appears that John Shakspere was then considered insolvent, if not as one depending rather on the credit of others than his own." It is of little consequence to the present age to know whether an alderman of Stratford, nearly three hundred years past, became unequal to maintain his social position; but to enable us to form a right estimate of the education of William Shakspere, and of the circumstances in which he was placed at the most influential period of his life, it may not be unprofitable to consider how far these revelations of the private affairs of his father support the case which Malone holds he has so triumphantly proved.

At the time in question, the best evidence is unfortunately destroyed; for the registry of the Court of Record at Stratford is wanting, from 1569 to 1585. Nothing has been added to what Malone has collected as to this precise period. It amounts therefore to this,—that in 1578 he mortgages an estate for forty pounds; that he is indebted also five pounds to a friend for which his mortgagee had become security; and that he is excused one public assessment, and has not contributed to another. At this time he is the possessor of two freehold houses in Henley Street, bought in 1574. Malone, a lawyer by profession, supposes that the money for which Asbies was mortgaged went to pay the purchase of the Stratford freeholds; according to which theory, these freeholds had been unpaid-for during four years, and the "good and lawful money" was not "in hand" when the vendor parted with the premises. We hold, and we think more reasonably, that in 1578, when he mortgaged Asbies, John Shakspere became the purchaser, or at any rate the occupier, of lands in the parish of Stratford, but not in the borough; and that, in either case, the money for which Asbies was mortgaged was the capital employed in this undertaking. The lands which were purchased by William Shakspere of the Combe family, in 1601, are described in the deed as "lying or being within the parish, fields, or town of Old Stretford." But the will of William Shakspere, he having become the heir-at-law of his father, devises all his lands and tenements "within the towns, hamlets, villages, fields, and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe."

* We print correct copies of these entries at the end of the Chapter. Malone's copies exhibit his usual inaccuracies.

Old Stratford is a local denomination, essentially different from Bishopton or Welcombe; and, therefore, whilst the lands purchased by the son in 1601 might be those recited in the will as lying in Old Stratford, he might have derived from his father the lands of Bishopton and Welcombe, of the purchase of which by himself we have no record. But we have a distinct record that William Shakspere did derive lands from his father, in the same way that he inherited the two freeholds in Henley Street. Mr. Halliwell prints, without any inference, a "Deed of Settlement of Shakespeare's Property, 1639;" that deed contains a remarkable recital, which appears conclusive as to the position of the father as a landed proprietor. The fine for the purpose of settlement is taken upon; 1, a tenement in Blackfriars; 2, a tenement at Acton; 3, the capital messuage of New Place; 4, the tenement in Henley Street; 5, one hundred and twenty-seven acres of land purchased of Combe; and 6, "all other the messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments whatsoever, situate lying and being in the towns, hamlets, villages, fields and grounds of Stratford upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton and Welcombe, or any of them in the said county of Warwick, *which heretofore were the* INHERITANCE *of William Shakspere*, gent., deceased." The word inheritance could only be used in one legal sense; *they came to him by descent*, as heir-at-law of his father. It would be difficult to find a more distinct confirmation of the memorandum upon the grant of arms in the Heralds' College to John Shakspere, "he hath lands and tenements, of good wealth and substance, 500*l*." The lands of Bishopton and Welcombe are in the parish of Stratford, but not in the borough. Bishopton was a hamlet, having an ancient chapel of ease. We hold, then, that in the year 1578 John Shakspere, having become more completely an agriculturist—a *yeoman* as he is described in a deed of 1579—ceased, for the purposes of business, to be an occupier within the borough of Stratford. Other aldermen are rated to pay towards the furniture of pikemen, billmen, and archers, six shillings and eight-pence; whilst John Shakspere is to pay three shillings and four-pence. Why less than other aldermen? The next entry but one, which relates to a brother alderman, suggests an answer to the question:—"Robert Bratt, *nothing* IN THIS PLACE." Again, ten months after,—"It is ordained that every alderman shall pay weekly, towards the relief of the poor, four-pence, save John Shakspere and *Robert Bratt*, who shall not be taxed to pay any thing." Here John Shakspere is associated with Robert Bratt, who, according to the previous entry, was to pay nothing in this place; that is, in the *borough* of Stratford, to which the orders of the council alone apply. The return, in 1579, of Mr. Shakspere as leaving unpaid the sum of three shillings and three-pence, was the return upon a levy for the *borough*, in which, although the possessor of property, he might have ceased to reside, or have only partially resided, paying his assessments in the *parish*. The Borough of Stratford, and the Parish of Stratford, are essentially different things, as regards entries of the Corporation and of the Court of Record. The Report from Commissioners of Municipal Corporations says, "The limits of the borough extend over a space of about half a mile in breadth, and rather more in length * * *. The mayor, recorder, and senior aldermen of the borough have also jurisdiction, as justices of the peace, over a small town or suburb adjoining the Church of Stratford-upon Avon, called Old

Stratford, and over the precincts of the church itself." We shall have occasion to revert to this distinction between the borough and the parish, at a more advanced period in the life of Shakspere's father, when his utter ruin has been somewhat rashly inferred from certain obscure registers.

Seeing, then, that at any rate, in the year 1574, when John Shakspere purchased two freehold houses in Stratford, it was scarcely necessary for him to withdraw his son William from school, as Rowe has it, on account of the narrowness of his circumstances (the education at that school costing the father nothing), it is not difficult to believe that the son remained there till the period when boys were usually withdrawn from grammar-schools. In those days the education of the university commenced much earlier than at present. Boys intended for the learned professions, and more especially for the church, commonly went to Oxford and Cambridge at eleven or twelve years of age. If they were not intended for those professions, they probably remained at the grammar-school till they were thirteen or fourteen; and then they were fitted for being apprenticed to tradesmen, or articled to attorneys, a numerous and thriving body in those days of cheap litigation. Many also went early to the Inns of Court, which were the universities of the law, and where there was real study and discipline in direct connection with the several Societies. To assume that William Shakspere did not stay long enough at the grammar-school of Stratford to obtain a very fair "proficiency in Latin," with some knowledge of Greek, is to assume an absurdity upon the face of the circumstances; and it could never have been assumed at all, had not Rowe, setting out upon a false theory, that, because in the works of Shakspere "we scarce find any traces of anything that looks like an imitation of the ancients," held that *therefore* "his not copying at least something from them may be an argument of his never having read them." Opposed to this is the statement of Aubrey, much nearer to the times of Shakspere: "he understood Latin pretty well." Rowe had been led into his illogical inference by the "small Latin and less Greek" of Jonson; the "old mother-wit" of Denham; the "his learning was very little" of Fuller; the "native wood-notes wild" of Milton,—phrases, every one of which is to be taken with considerable qualification, whether we regard the peculiar characters of the utterers, or the circumstances connected with the words themselves. The question rests not upon the interpretation of the dictum of this authority or that; but upon the indisputable fact that the very earliest writings of Shakspere are imbued with a spirit of classical antiquity; and that the allusive nature of the learning that manifests itself in them, whilst it offers the best proof of his familiarity with the ancient writers, is a circumstance which has misled those who never attempted to dispute the existence of the learning which was displayed in the direct pedantry of his contemporaries. "*If*," said Hales of Eton, "he had not *read* the classics, he had likewise not *stolen* from them." Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and all the early dramatists, overload their plays with quotation and mythological allusion. According to Hales, they steal, and therefore they have read. He who uses his knowledge skilfully is assumed not to have read.

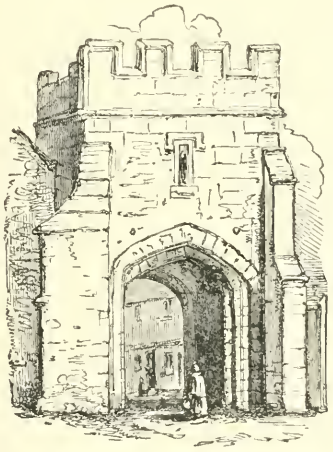
It is not our intention to enter upon a general examination of the various opinions that have been held as to the learning of Shakspere, and the tendency of those opinions to show that he was without learning.* We only desire to point out, by a very few observations, that the learning manifested in his early productions does not bear out the assertion of Rowe that his proficiency in the Latin language was interrupted by his early removal from the free-school of Stratford. His youthful poem, Venus and Adonis, the first heir of his invention, is upon a classical subject. The Rape of Lucrece is founded upon a legend of the beginnings of Roman history. Would he have ventured upon these subjects had he been unfamiliar with the ancient writers, from the attentive study of which he could alone obtain the knowledge which would enable him to treat them with propriety? His was an age of sound scholarship. He dedicates both poems to a scholar, and a patron of scholars. Does any one of his contemporaries object that these classical subjects were treated by a young man ignorant of the classics? Will the most critical examination of these poems detect anything that betrays this ignorance? Is there not the most perfect keeping in both these poems,—an original conception of the mode of treating these subjects, advisedly adopted with the full knowledge of what might be imitated, but preferring the vigorous painting of nature to any imitation? Love's Labour 's Lost, undoubtedly one of the earliest comedies, shows—upon the principle laid down by Coleridge, that "a young author's first work almost always bespeaks his recent pursuits"—that the habits of William Shakspere "had been scholastic, and those of a student." The Comedy of Errors is full of those imitations of the ancients in particular passages which critics have in all cases been too apt to take as the chief evidences of learning. The critics of Shakspere are puzzled by these imitations; and when they see with what skill he adopts, or amends, or rejects, the incidents of the 'Menæchmi' of Plautus, they have no resource but to contend that his knowledge of Plautus was derived from a wretched translation, published in all probability eight or ten years after the Comedy of Errors was written. The three Parts of Henry VI. are the earliest of the historical plays. Those who dispute the genuineness of the First Part affirm that it contains more allusions to mythology and classical authors than Shakspere ever uses; but, with a most singular inconsistency, in the passages of the Second and Third Parts which they have chosen to pronounce as the additions of Shakspere to the original plays of another writer or writers, there are to be found as many allusions to mythology and classical writers as in the part which they deny to be his.† We have remarked upon these passages that they furnish the proof that, as a young writer, he possessed a competent knowledge of the ancient authors, and was not unwilling to display it; "but that, with that wonderful judgment which was as remarkable as the prodigious range of his imaginative powers, he soon learnt to avoid the pedantry to which inferior men so pertinaciously clung in the pride of their scholarship."

* This question is further touched upon in our 'History of Opinion on the Writings of Shakspere.'—Section I.

† See our Essay on Henry VI. and Richard III. Histories, Vol. II. page 432.

But the laugh of the parody was a harmless one. The Nine Worthies were utterly dead and gone in the popular estimation. Certainly in the crowd before St. John's School at Coventry there would be more than one who would laugh at the speeches—merry souls, ready to "play on the tabor to the Worthies, and let them dance the hay."*

* Love's Labour's Lost, Act v. It is scarcely necessary to refer the reader to the same play for the speeches of Hector, Alexander, and Pompey. The coincidence between these and the old Coventry Pageant is remarkable.



[Ancient Gate of Coventry, 1842.]

English book of history or travel,—volumes which the active presses of London had sent cheaply amongst the people. The time is arrived when he has quitted the free-school. His choice of a worldly occupation is scarcely yet made. The wishes of his father, whatever they may be, are rather hinted at than carried out. It is that pause which so often takes place in the life of a youth, when the world shows afar off like a vast plain with many paths, all bright and sunny, and losing themselves in the distance, where it is fancied there is something brighter still. At this season we may paint the family of John Shakspere at their evening fireside. The mother is plying her distaff, or hearing Richard his lesson out of the A B C book. The father and the elder son are each intent upon a book of chronicles, manly reading. Gilbert is teaching his sister Joan *Gamut*, "the ground of all accord;" whilst the little Anne, a petted child, is wilfully twanging upon the lute which her sister has laid down. A neighbour comes in upon business with the father, who quits the room; and then all the group crowd round their elder brother, who has laid aside his chronicle, to entreat him for a story; the mother even joins in the children's prayer to their gentle brother. Has not he, himself, pictured such a home scene? May we not read for Hermione, Mary Shakspere, and for Mamillius, William?—

"*Her.* What wisdom stirs amongst you? Come, sir, now
I am for you again: Pray you, sit by us,
And tell 's a tale.
Mam. Merry, or sad, shall 't be?
Her. As merry as you will.
Mam. A sad tale 's best for winter:
I have one of sprites and goblins.
Her. Let 's have that, good sir.
Come on, sit down:—Come on, and do your best
To fright me with your sprites: you 're powerful at it.
Mam. There was a man,—
Her. Nay, come, sit down; then on.
Mam. Dwelt by a churchyard.—I will tell it softly;
Yon crickets shall not hear it.
Her. Come on then,
And give 't me in mine ear." *

And truly that boy had access to a prodigious mine of such stories, whether "merry or sad." He had a copy, well thumbed from his first reading days, of 'The Palace of Pleasure, beautified, adorned, and well furnished with pleasaunt histories and excellent nouelles, selected out of diuers good and commendable authors; by William Painter, Clarke of the Ordinaunce and Armarie.' In this book, according to the dedication of the translator to Ambrose Earl of Warwick, was set forth "the great valiance of noble gentlemen, the terrible combats of courageous personages, the virtuous minds of noble dames, the chaste hearts of constant ladies, the wonderful patience of puissant princes, the mild sufferance of well-disposed gentlewomen, and, in divers, the quiet bearing of adverse fortune." Pleasant little apophthegms and short fables were there in that book, which the brothers and sisters of William Shakspere had heard him tell with marvellous spirit, and they abided therefore in their memories. There was

* Winter's Tale, Act II., Scene I.

Æsop's fable of the old lark and her young ones, wherein "he prettily and aptly doth premonish that hope and confidence of things attempted by man ought to be fixed and trusted in none other but in himself." There was the story, most delightful to a child, of the bondman at Rome, who was brought into the open place upon which a great multitude looked, to fight with a lion of a marvellous bigness; and the fierce lion when he saw him "suddenly stood still, and afterwards by little and little, in gentle sort, he came unto the man as though he had known him," and licked his hands and legs; and the bondman told that he had healed in former time the wounded foot of the lion, and the beast became his friend. These were for the younger children; but William had now a new tale, out of the same storehouse, upon which he had often pondered; the subject of which had shaped itself in his mind into dialogue that almost sounded like verse in his earnest and graceful recitation. It was a tale which Painter translated from the French of Pierre Boisteau—a true tale, as he records it, "the memory whereof to this day is so well known at Verona, as unneths* their blubbered eyes be yet dry that saw and beheld that lamentable sight." It was 'The goodly history of the true and constant love between Romeo and Julietta.' Then the youth described how Romeo came into the hall of the Capulets, whose family were at variance with his own, the Montesches, and, "very shamefaced, withdrew himself into a corner;—but by reason of the light of the torches, which burned very bright, he was by and by known and looked upon by the whole company;" how he held the frozen hand of Juliet, the daughter of the Capulet, and it warmed and thrilled, so that from that moment there was love between them; how the lady was told that Romeo was the "son of her father's capital enemy and deadly foe;" how, in the little street before her father's house, Juliet saw Romeo walking, "through the brightness of the moon;" how they were joined in holy marriage secretly by the good Friar Lawrence; and then came bloodshed, and grief, and the banishment of Romeo, and the friar gave the lady a drug to produce a pleasant sleep, which was like unto death; and she, "so humble, wise, and debonnaire," was laid "in the ordinary grave of the Capulets," as one dead, and Romeo, having bought poison of an apothecary, went to the tomb, and there lay down and died; and the sleeping wife awoke, and with the aid of the dagger of Romeo she died beside him. There were "blubbered eyes" also at that fireside of the Shaksperes, for the youth told the story with wonderful animation. From the same collection of tales had he before half dramatized the story of "Giletta of Narbonne," who cured the King of France of a painful malady, and the King gave her in marriage to the Count Beltramo, with whom she had been brought up, and her husband despised and forsook her, but at last they were united, and lived in great honour and felicity. There was another collection, too, which that youth had diligently read,—the 'Gesta Romanorum,' translated by R. Robinson in 1577,—old legends, come down to those latter days from monkish historians, who had embodied in their narratives all the wild traditions of the ancient and modern world. He could tell the story of the rich heiress who chose a husband by the machinery of a gold, a silver, and a leaden casket;—and another story of the merchant whose

* *Unneths*, scarcely.

inexorable creditor required the fulfilment of his bond in cutting a pound of flesh nearest the merchant's heart, and by the skilful interpretation of the bond the cruel creditor was defeated. There was the story too, in these legends, of the Emperor Theodosius, who had three daughters ; and those two daughters who said they loved him more than themselves were unkind to him, but the youngest, who only said she loved him as much as he was worthy, succoured him in his need, and was his true daughter. There was in that collection also a feeble outline of the history of a king whose wife died upon the stormy sea, and her body was thrown overboard, and the child she then bore was lost, and found by the father after many years, and the mother was also wonderfully kept in life. Stories such as these, preserved amidst the wreck of time, were to that youth like the seeds that are found in the tombs of ruined cities, lying with the bones of forgotten generations, but which the genial influences of nature will call into life, and they shall become flowers, and trees, and food for man.

But, beyond all these, our Mamillius had many a tale "of sprites and goblins." He told them, we may well believe at that period, with an assenting faith, if not a prostrate reason. They were not then, in his philosophy, altogether "the very coinage of the brain." Such appearances were above nature, but the commonest movements of the natural world had them in subjection :—

> "I have heard,
> The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
> Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
> Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
> Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
> The extravagant and erring spirit hies
> To his confine." *

Powerful they were, but yet powerless. They came for benevolent purposes ; to warn the guilty ; to discover the guilt. The belief in them was not a debasing thing. It was associated with the enduring confidence that rested upon a world beyond this material world. Love hoped for such visitations ; it had its dreams of such—where the loved one looked smilingly, and spoke of regions where change and separation were not. They might be talked of, even amongst children then, without terror. They lived in that corner of the soul which had trust in angel protections ; which believed in celestial hierarchies ; which listened to hear the stars moving in harmonious music—

> "Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins,"

but listened in vain, for,

> "Whilse this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it." †

William Shakspere could also tell to his greedy listeners, how

> "In olde dayis of the king Arteur,
> Of which that Bretons speken gret honour,
> All was this lond full filled of faerie ;
> The elf-queene, with her jolly compagnie,
> Danced full oft in many a grene mede." ‡

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* Hamlet. † Merchant of Venice. ‡ Chaucer, 'Wife of Bath's Tale.'

Here was something in his favourite old poet for the youth to work out into beautiful visions of a pleasant race of supernatural beings; who lived by day in the acorn cups of Arden, and by moonlight held their revels on the green sward of Avon-side, the ringlets of their dance being duly seen,

"Whereof the ewe not bites;"

who tasted the honey-bag of the bee, and held counsel by the light of the glow-worm; who kept the cankers from the rosebuds, and silenced the hootings of the owl. But he had his story, too, of a "shrewd and knavish sprite," whether named Robin-Goodfellow, Kit-with-the-canstick, Man-in-the-oak, Fire-drake, Puckle, Tom-tumbler, or Hobgoblin. Did he not grind malt and mustard, and sweep the house at midnight, and was not his standing fee a mess of white milk?* Some day would William make a little play of Fairies, and Joan should be the Queen, and he would be the King; for he had talked with the Fairies, and he knew their language and their manners, and they were "good people," and would not mind a boy's sport with them.

But when the youth began to speak of witches there was fear and silence. For did not his mother recollect that in the year she was married Bishop Jewel had told the Queen that her subjects pined away, even unto the death, and that their affliction was owing to the increase of witches and sorcerers? Was it not known how there were three sorts of witches,—those that can hurt and not help, those that can help and not hurt, and those that can both help and hurt?† It was unsafe even to talk of them. But the youth had met with the history of the murder of Duncan King of Scotland, in a chronicler older than Holinshed: and he told softly, so that "yon crickets shall not hear it,"—that, as Macbeth and Banquo journeyed from Forres, sporting by the way together, when the warriors came in the midst of a laund three weird sisters suddenly appeared to them, in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of an elder world, and prophesied that Macbeth should be King of Scotland; and Macbeth from that hour desired to be King, and so killed the good King his liege lord. And then the story-teller and his listeners would pass on to safer matters—to the calculations of learned men who could read the fates of mankind in the aspects of the stars; and of those more deeply learned, clothed in garments of white linen, who had command over the spirits of the earth, of the water, and of the air. Some of the children said that a horse-shoe over the door, and vervain and dill, would preserve them, as they had been told, from the devices of sorcery. But their mother called to their mind that there was security far more to be relied on than charms of herb or horse-shoe—that there was a Power that would preserve them from all evil, seen or unseen, if such were His gracious will, and if they humbly sought Him, and offered up their hearts to Him, in all love and trust. And to that Power this household then addressed themselves; and the night was without fear, and their sleep was pleasant.

* See Scot's 'Discovery of Witchcraft,' 1584. † Ibid.

[Stratford Church, West End.]

NOTE ON THE STRATFORD REGISTERS.

The Parish Register of Stratford is a tall, narrow book, of considerable thickness, the leaves formed of very fine vellum. This one book contains the entries of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials. The Register commences with the record of a baptism, on the 25th of March, 1558. But it has not been previously stated (it ought to have been stated by Malone) that the entries, whether of Baptisms, Marriages, or Burials, are all, without exception, in the same handwriting, from the first entry, to September 14 in the year 1600. But although the Register is thus only a transcript for forty-two years, there is no reason to doubt its authenticity and perfect correctness; for each page is signed by Richard Bifield, the vicar, and four churchwardens, in attestation of its being a correct copy. Richard Bifield was vicar of Stratford from 1596 to 1610; and to him we are, in all probability, indebted for this transcript of the original Registers, which were most likely on loose leaves of paper. Subsequently, the Registers are not made at the time of the performance of the Church-office. They generally appear to be entered monthly; but sometimes the transcript seems to have been made at longer intervals. The signature of the churchwardens of the year is then affixed to each page as a testimonial of its accuracy.

The following List is transcribed *verbatim* from this Register Book. It includes all the entries which are important to the general reader.

BAPTISMS.

1558 Septēber 15	Jone Shakspere daughter to John Shakspere.
1562 December 2	Margareta filia Johannis Shakspere.
1564 April 26	Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere.
1566 October 13	Gilbertus filius Johannis Shakspere
1569 April 15	Ione the daughter of John Shakspere.
1571 Septēb 28	Anna filia Magistri Shakspere.
1573 [1573-4] March 11 . . .	Richard sonne to Mr. John Shakspeer.
1580 May 3	Edmund sonne to Mr. John Shakspere.
1583 May 26	Susanna daughter to William Shakspere.
1584 [1584-5] February 2. . .	Hamnet & Iudeth sonne and daughter to Williā Shakspere.

*** There are then entries of Ursula, 1588; Humphrey, 1590; Philippus, 1591;—children of John Shakspere (not *Mr.*).

MARRIAGES.

1607 Junii 5	John Hall gentlemā & Susanna Shaxspere.
1615 [1615-6] February 10 . .	Tho: Queeny tow Judith Shakspere.

BURIALS.

1563 April 30	Margareta filia Johannis Shakspere.
1579 April 4	Anne daughter to Mr. John Shakspere.
1596 August 11	Hamnet filius William Shakspere.
1601 Septemb 8	Mr. Johānes Shakspeare.
1608 Sept 9	Mayry Shaxspere, Wydowe.
1612 [1612-13] February 4 . .	Rich. Shakspeare.
1616 April 25	Will: Shakspere, Gent.
1623 August 8	Mrs. Shakspeare.
1649 July 16	Mrs. Susanna Hall, Widow.
1661 [1661-2] Feb. 9	Judith, uxor Thomas Quiney.

*** It appears by the Register of Burials that Dr. Hall, one of the sons-in-law of William Shakspere, was buried on the 26th November, 1635. He is described in the entry as "Medicus peritissimus." The Register contains no entry of the burial of Thomas Quiney. Elizabeth, the daughter of John and Susanna Hall, was baptized February 21, 1607 [1607-8]; and she is mentioned in her illustrious grandfather's will. The children of Judith, who was only married two months before the death of her father, appear to have been three sons, all of whom died before their mother.

NOTE ON THE ALLEGED POVERTY OF JOHN SHAKSPERE.

The following are the principal documents upon which Malone's argument is established:—

1. "Burgus Stratford. } Ad aulam ībm tent. xxix° die Januarii, a° regni dnæ Elizabeth, &c., vicesimo.

At this hall yt is agreed that every alderman, except such underwrytten excepted, shal. paye towards the furniture of three pikemen, ij billmen, and one archer, vis. viij*d.*, and every burgess, except such underwrytten excepted, shall pay iij*s.* iv*d.*:—

Mr. Plymley, vs.
Mr. Shaxpeare, iij*s.* iv*d.*
John Walker, ij*s.* vi*d.*
Robert Bratt, nothinge in this place.
Thomas Brogden, ij*s.* vi*d.*
William Brace, ij*s.*
Anthony Tanner, ij*s.* vi*d.*
Sum, vi*li.* xiiij*d.*

The inhabitants of every ward are taxed at this hall,* as by notes to them delivered yt may appear."

2. "Ad aulam ībm tent. xix°. die Novembris a° regni dnæ Elizabeth, &c., xxi°.

Itm. yt is ordeined that every alderman shall paye weekely towards the releif of the poore iiij*d.* saving John Shaxpeare and Robert Bratt, who shall not be taxed to pay anythinge. Mr. Lewes and Mr. Plimley are taxed to pay weekely, eyther of them iij*d.*,† and every burgesses are taxed to pay weekely at ij*d.* apece."

3. "Stratford Burgus. } Curia dnæ Reginæ ībm tent. xiii. die Januarii, anno regni, &c., vicesimo octavo.

Ad hunc diem Servien. ad Clavam burgi predict. retorn. pr. de distr. eis direct. versus Johem Shackspere ad sect. Johīs Browne, q^d^ predict. Johes Shackspere nihil habet unde distr. potest.‡ Ideo fiat Ca. versus Johem Shackspere ad sect. Johīs Browne, si petatur."

4. "Debtes which are owing unto me, Roger Sadler.

Imprimis, of Mr. John Combes, the elder, for a horse, 3*l.*
Item, of the same J. C., due to me by bond at Christmas next, 20*l.*
Item, of Richard Hathaway, alias Gardyner, of Shottery, 6*l.* 8*s.* 4*d.*
Item, of Edmond Lambart, and Cornishe, for the debt of Mr. John Shacksper. 5*l.*"

* Malone has omitted, *at this hall.*

† Malone here inserts, *apece.*

‡ Here Malone has inserted, *levari.*

NOTE ON THE SCHOOL LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKSPERE.

We have already referred to the two novelets of Tieck, in which he sketches out the early career of the poet. The following extract may be interesting to our readers. It is scarcely necessary to say that we do not take the same view as the German critic—that we do not think the school-progress of William Shakspere was slow; that he suffered from the strict temper of his father, and was the witness of family misfortunes. The evidence of all the early writings of Shakspere goes far to prove that he had looked upon existence with an eye of untroubled cheerfulness. Never did any young poet possess his soul more undisturbed with fears of

"Poverty's unconquerable bar."

The narrative which we subjoin professes to be a relation by the poet himself to the Earl of Southampton. We give it from a translation which appeared some years ago in 'The Academic Chronicle,' a literary journal of considerable merit, but of short vitality:—

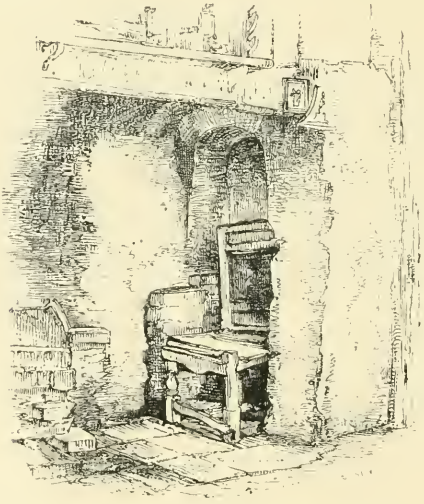
"'It was in a season of religious and political commotion,' resumed the poet, 'that I myself was born. It happened, too, that at that very period there came to Warwickshire and the neighbouring counties a man of superior ability and learning, who in the course of his travels had gained over numerous converts to the Catholic Church,—William Allen, who was afterwards made a cardinal. Among other places he visited Stratford, and excited much disquiet both in that little town and in our family. He entirely worked himself into the affections of my uncle, my father's brother; and even my father himself was for some time wavering in doubt, and greatly troubled in mind. The latter, who was of a gloomy disposition, was always melancholy, and this agitation of religious opinions led him into many disputes both with his own relations and with his neighbours. Besides this, it was a matter of peril to hold any intercourse with foreign priests, while, at the same time, those who were either evil-disposed, or were zealous Protestants, caught at every suspicious report. My earliest impressions were of a gloomy cast; my mother alone, who made much of me, was of a cheerful temper. She was of a clever turn, and her memory was stored with many a tale of marvel and mystery which she was wont to relate to me. On the intelligence of the dreadful tragedy of St. Bartholomew's eve reaching England, many proselytes—at least those who had begun to lean towards the ancient faith—again changed their sentiments.

"'My father, however, still continued dissatisfied with me, for my progress at school was exceedingly slow. Never shall I forget that free-school in the Guildhall, where I used to sit at the old worm-eaten oaken desk, poring over my task, till what sense and comprehension I had seemed ready to leave me, and I often feared that I should become quite stupid. Would not one be tempted to think such schools had been purposely contrived to terrify children altogether from study and learning, lest too much thinking should disturb society? This eternal going over the same thing, this useless repetition of what has already been learned, calculated only for such as are slow of comprehension, while no regard is had to him who is more apt in his studies, often drove me to distraction. Even this very repetition of what was already familiar to me prevented me from retaining it in my memory, and my disgust at this mode of teaching increased to such a degree, that I felt a horror of mind whenever I thought of this school and my instructors there.

"'My poor father, whose business was altered materially for the worse, wished to have as soon as possible some assistance in the management of it and in keeping his accounts; nor was I by any means sorry that he took me away earlier than usual from school, and gave me a private teacher at home, while I was employed by him in his own affairs. It was natural that I should form acquaintances with lads of my own age, who would frequently take me along with them in

their little excursions and rambles, or invite me to join their meetings. My father, however, who entertained very strict and singular notions of morality, accounted all such recreations sinful indulgence, nor could he easily be brought to consent that I should partake in them. In the family of the Hathaways I used to spend much of my time: the son was a brisk, lively fellow—a jolly boon-companion; and the daughter, Anne, who was my senior by some ten years,* treated me as if I had been her younger brother. Like many other persons in our town and its neighbourhood, the Hathaways showed me friendliness and kindness, but I perceived they considered me a lad fit for very little, and one who would never turn out to be anything extraordinary.'"

* An error. Anne Hathaway (Tieck calls her Johanne) died in 1623, aged 67. She was thus about seven years older than her husband.



[Chimney corner of the Kitchen in Henley Street.]

[The Bailiff's Play.]

CHAPTER X.

THE PLAYERS AT STRATFORD.

The ancient accounts of the Chamberlain of the borough of Stratford exhibit a number of payments made out of the funds of the corporation for theatrical performances.* In 1569, when John Shakspere was high bailiff, there is a payment of nine shillings to the Queen's players, and of twelve pence to the Earl of Worcester's players. In 1573 the Earl of Leicester's players received five shillings and eightpence. In 1576 "my Lord of Warwick's players" have a gratuity of seventeen shillings, and the Earl of Worcester's players of five and eightpence. In 1577 "my Lord of Leicester's players" receive fifteen shillings, and "my Lord of Worcester's players" three and fourpence. In 1579 and 1580 the entries are more circumstantial :—

* Mr. Halliwell, in his Life of Shakspere, presents us with voluminous extracts from the account books of the chamberlains from 1543 to 1717.

"1579. Item paid to my Lord Strange men the xith day of February at the comaundement of Mr Bayliffe, vs.

P^d at the comandement of Mr. Baliffe to the Countys of Essex plears, xivs. vi*d.*

1580. P^d to the Earle of Darbyes players at the comaundement of Mr. Baliffe, viiis. iv*d.*"

It thus appears that there had been three sets of players at Stratford within a short distance of the time when William Shakspere was sixteen years of age. We shall here endeavour to present a general view of the state of the stage at this point of its history; with reference to the impressions which theatrical performances would then make upon him who would be the chief instrument in building up upon these rude foundations a noble and truly poetical drama—such a view as may enable the reader to form a tolerable conception of the amusements which were so highly popular, and so amply encouraged, in a small town far distant from the capital, as to invite three distinct sets of players there to exhibit in the brief period which is defined in the above entries.

It is a curious circumstance that the most precise and interesting account which we possess of one of the earliest of the theatrical performances is from the recollection of a man who was born in the same year as William Shakspere. In 1639 R. W. (R. Willis), stating his age to be seventy-five, published a little volume, called 'Mount Tabor,' which contains a passage which is essential to be given in any history or sketch of the early stage.*

"Upon a Stage-Play which I saw when I was a Child.

"In the city of Gloucester the manner is (as I think it is in other like corporations) that, when players of interludes come to town, they first attend the mayor, to inform him what nobleman's servants they are, and so to get licence for their public playing; and if the mayor like the actors, or would show respect to their lord and master, he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the aldermen and common council of the city; and that is called the mayor's play, where every one that will comes in without money, the mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit, to show respect unto them. At such a play my father took me with him, and made me stand between his legs, as he sat upon one of the benches, where we saw and heard very well. The play was called 'The Cradle of Security,' wherein was personated a king or some great prince with his courtiers of several kinds, amongst which three ladies were in special grace with him, and they, keeping him in delights and pleasures, drew him from his graver counsellors, hearing of sermons, and listening to good counsel and admonitions, that in the end they got him to lie down in a cradle upon the stage, where these three ladies, joining in a sweet song, rocked him asleep, that he snorted again, and in the mean time closely conveyed under the clothes wherewithal he was covered a vizard like a swine's snout upon his face, with three wire chains fastened thereunto, the other end whereof being holden severally by those three ladies, who fall to singing again, and then discovered his face, that the spectators might see how they had transformed him going on with their singing. Whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another door at the farthest end of the stage, two old men, the one in blue, with a sergeant-at-arms his mace on his shoulder, the other in red, with a drawn sword in his hand, and leaning with the other hand upon the other's shoulder, and so they two went along in a soft pace, round about by the skirt of the stage, till at last they came to the cradle, when all the court was in greatest jollity, and then the foremost old man with his mace struck a fearful blow upon the cradle, whereat all the courtiers, with the three ladies and the vizard, all vanished; and the desolate prince, starting up barefaced, and finding himself thus sent for to judgment, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carried away by wicked spirits. This prince did personate in the moral the wicked of the world; the three

* This account was first extracted by Malone in his 'Rise and Progress of the English Stage.' It has been given also, with the correction of a few inaccuracies, by Mr. Collier.

ladies, pride, covetousness, and luxury; the two old men, the end of the world and the last judgment. This sight took such impression in me, that when I came towards man's estate it was as fresh in my memory as if I had seen it newly acted."

We now understand why the bailiff of Stratford paid the players out of the public money. The first performance of each company in this town was the bailiff's, or chief magistrate's, play; and thus, when the father of William Shakspere was bailiff, the boy might have stood "between his legs as he sat upon one of the benches." It would appear from Willis's description that 'The Cradle of Security' was for the most part dumb show. It is probable that he was present at its performance at Gloucester when he was six or seven years of age; it evidently belongs to that class of moral plays which were of the simplest construction. And yet it was popular long after the English drama had reached its highest eminence. When the pageants and mysteries had been put down by the force of public opinion, when spectacles of a dramatic character had ceased to be employed as instruments of religious instruction, the professional players who had sprung up founded their popularity for a long period upon the ancient habits and associations of the people. Our drama was essentially formed by a course of steady progress, and not by rapid transition. We are accustomed to say that the drama was created by Shakspere, Marlowe, Greene, Kyd, and a few others of distinguished genius; but they all of them worked upon a foundation which was ready for them. The superstructure of real tragedy and comedy had to be erected upon the moral plays, the romances, the histories, which were beginning to be popular in the very first days of Queen Elizabeth, and continued to be so, even in their very rude forms, beyond the close of her long reign.

We have very distinct evidence that stories from the Sacred Scriptures, in character perhaps very little different from the ancient Mysteries, were performed upon the London stage at a period when classical histories, romantic legends, and comedies of intrigue, attracted numerous audiences both in the capital and the provinces. At the period which we are now describing there was a fierce controversy going forward on the subject of theatrical exhibitions; and from the very rare tracts then published we are enabled to form a tolerably accurate estimate of the character of the early theatre. In one of these tracts, which appeared in 1580, entitled 'A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters,' we have the following passage:—"The reverend word of God, and histories of the Bible, set forth on the stage by these blasphemous players, are so corrupted by their gestures of scurrility, and so interlaced with unclean and whorish speeches, that it is not possible to draw any profit out of the doctrine of their spiritual moralities. For that they exhibit under laughing that which ought to be taught and received reverendly. So that their auditory may return made merry in mind, but none comes away reformed in manners. And of all abuses this is most undecent and intolerable, to suffer holy things to be handled by men so profane, and defiled by interposition of dissolute words." (Page 103.) Those who have read the ancient Mysteries, and even the productions of Bishop Bale which appeared not thirty years before this was written, will agree that the players ought not wholly to have the blame of the "interposition of dissolute words." But unquestionably it

was a great abuse to have "histories of the Bible set forth on the stage;" for the use and advantage of such dramatic histories had altogether ceased. Indeed although Scriptural subjects might have continued to have been represented in 1580, we apprehend that they were principally taken from apocryphal stories, which were regarded with little reverence even by those who were most earnest in their hostility to the stage. Of such a character is the very curious play, printed in 1565, entitled 'A pretie new Enterlude, both pithie and pleasaunt, of the story of King Daryus, being taken out of the third and fourth chapter of the third book of Esdras.' This was an interlude that might acceptably have been performed, at the commandment of the bailiff of Stratford, by my Lord Strange's men, in February, 1580; and we request therefore the indulgence of our readers whilst we endeavour to describe what such a performance would have been.

The hall of the Guild, which afterwards became the Town Hall, was the occasional theatre of Stratford. It is now a long room, and somewhat low, the building being divided into two floors, the upper of which is used as the Grammar School. The elevation for the Court at one end of the hall would form the stage; and on one side is an ancient separate chamber, to which the performers would retire. With a due provision of benches, about three hundred persons could be accommodated in this room; and no doubt Mr. Bailiff would be liberal in the issue of his invitations, so that Stratford might not grudge its expenditure of five shillings. A plain cloth curtain—"the blanket" of the stage—is drawn on one side; and "the Prolocutor" comes forward with solemn stride, to explain the object of 'The worthy Entertainment of King Daryus:'—

"Good people, hark, and give ear a while,
For of this enterlude I will declare the style.

. . . . .

A certain king to you we shall bring in
Whose name was Darius, good and virtuous;
This king commanded a feast to be made,
And at that banquet many people had.

. . . . .

And when the king in counsel was set
Two lords commanded he to be fet,
As concerning matters of three young men;
Which briefly showed their fantasy then:
In writings their meanings they did declare,
And to give them to the king they did not spare.

. . . . .

Now silence I desire you therefore,
For the Vice is entering at the door."

The stage-direction then says, "The Prologue goeth out and Iniquity comes in. This is "the formal Vice Iniquity" of Richard III.; the "Vetus Iniquitas" of 'The Devil is an Ass;' the Iniquity with a "wooden dagger," and "a juggler's jerkin with false skirts," of 'The Staple of News.' But in the interlude of 'Darius' he has less complex offices than are assigned him by Gifford—"to instigate the hero of the piece to wickedness, and, at the same time, to

protect him from the devil, whom he was permitted to buffet and baffle with his wooden sword, till the process of the story required that both the protector and the protected should be carried off by the fiend; or the latter driven roaring from the stage by some miraculous interposition in favour of the repentant offender."* The first words which Iniquity utters indicate, however, that he was familiar with the audience, and the audience familiar with him:—

> "How now, my masters; how goeth the world now?
> I come gladly to talk with you."

And in a most extraordinary manner he does talk; swaggering and bullying as if the whole world was at his command, till Charity comes in, and reads him a very severe lecture upon the impropriety of his deportment. It is of little avail; for two friends of Iniquity—Importunity and Partiality—come to his assistance, and fairly drive Charity off the stage. Then Equity enters to take up the quarrel against Iniquity and his fellows; but Equity is no match for them, and they all make way for King Darius. This very long scene has nothing whatever to do with the main action of the piece, or rather what professes to be its action. But the Stratford audience is a patient one; and the Vice, however dull was his profligacy, contrived to make them laugh by the whisking of his tail and the brandishing of his sword, assisted no doubt by some well-known chuckle like that of the Punch of our own days. King Darius, however, at length comes with all his Council; and most capital names do his chief councillors bear, not unworthy to be adopted even in Courts of greater refinement—Perplexity and Curiosity. The whole business of this scene of King Darius is to present a feast to the admiring spectators. Up to the present day the English audience delights in a feast; and will endure that two men should sit upon the stage for a quarter of an hour, uttering the most unrepeatable stupidity, provided they seem to pick real chicken-bones and drink real port. The Darius of the interlude feasted whole nations—upon the representative system; and here, at Stratford, Ethiopia, Persia, Judah, and Media, ate their fill and were very grateful. But feasts must have their end; and so the curtain closes upon the eaters, and Iniquity "cometh in singing:"—

> "La, soule, soule, fa, my, re, re,
> I miss a note I dare well say:
> I should have been low when I was so high;
> I shall have it right anon verily."

Again come his bottle-holders, Importunity and Partiality; and in the course of their gabble Iniquity tells them that the Pope is his father. Unhappily his supporters go out; and then Equity attacks him alone. Loud is their debate; and faster and more furious is the talk when Constancy and Charity come in. The matter, however, ends seriously; and they resolving that it is useless to argue longer with this impenitent sinner, "somebody casts fire to Iniquity," and he departs in a tempest of squibs and crackers. The business of the play now

* Ben Jonson's Works. Note on 'The Devil is an Ass.'

at length begins. Darius tells his attendants that the three men who kept his chamber while he slept woke him by their disputing and murmuring,—

> "Every man to say a weightier matter than the other."

The subject of their dispute was, what is the strongest thing; and their answers as we are informed by the King's attendants, had been reduced to writing:—

> "The sentence of the first man is this,
> Wine a very strong thing is;
> The second also I will declare to you,
> That the king is stronger than any other thing verily;
> The third also I will declare—
> Women, saith he, is the strongest of all,
> Though by women we had a fall."

Of their respective texts the three young men are then called in to make exposition; and certainly, whatever defects of manners were exhibited by the audiences of that day, they must have possessed the virtue of patience in a remarkable degree to have enabled them to sit out these most prolix harangues. But they have an end; and the King declares Zorobabel to be deserving of signal honours, in his demonstration that, of all things, woman is the strongest. A metrical prayer for Queen Elizabeth, uttered by Constancy, dismisses the audience to their homes in such a loyal temper as befits the Corporation of Stratford and their friends on all public occasions to cherish. We doubt if William Shakspere considers "the pretty new interlude both pithy and pleasant of the story of King Darius" to be the perfect model of a popular drama.*

The sojourn of my Lord Strange's men at Stratford has been short; but now the Countess of Essex's players have arrived. We have seen that in previous years the players of Lord Warwick, of Lord Leicester, of Lord Worcester, have been at Stratford, and on each occasion they have been patronised by the Corporation. In a later period of the stage, when the actors chiefly depended upon the large support of the public, instead of receiving the wages of noblemen, however wealthy and powerful, the connection of a company of players with the great personage whose "servants" they were called was scarcely more than a licence to act without the interference of the magistrate. But in the period of the stage which we are now describing, it would appear that the players were literally the retainers of powerful lords, who employed them for their own recreation, and allowed them to derive a profit from occasional public exhibitions. In 'The Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres' we have the following passage, which appears decisive upon this point:—"What credit can return to the nobleman to countenance his men to exercise that quality which is not sufferable in any commonweal? Whereas, it was an ancient custom that no man of honour should retain any man but such as was as excellent in some one

* There is a copy of this very curious production in the Garrick Collection of plays in the British Museum; and a transcript of Garrick's copy is in the Bodleian Library. Its date, as before mentioned, is 1565.

good quality or another, whereby, if occasion so served, he might get his own living. Then was every nobleman's house a commonweal in itself. But since the retaining of these caterpillars the credit of noblemen hath decayed, and they are thought to be covetous by permitting their servants, which cannot live by themselves, and whom for nearness they will not maintain, to live on the devotion or alms of other men, passing from country to country, from one gentleman's house to another, offering their service, which is a kind of beggary. Who, indeed, to speak more truly, are become beggars for their servants. For commonly the good will men bear to their lords makes them draw the strings of their purses to extend their liberality to them, where otherwise they would not." Speaking of the writers of plays, the same author adds,—"But some perhaps will say the nobleman delighteth in such things, whose humours must be contented, partly for fear and partly for commodity; and if they write matters pleasant they are best preferred in Court among the cunning heads."—(Page 108.) In the old play of 'The Taming of *a* Shrew' the players in the 'Induction' are presented to us in very homely guise. The messenger tells the lord—

> "Your players be come,
> And do attend your honour's pleasure here."

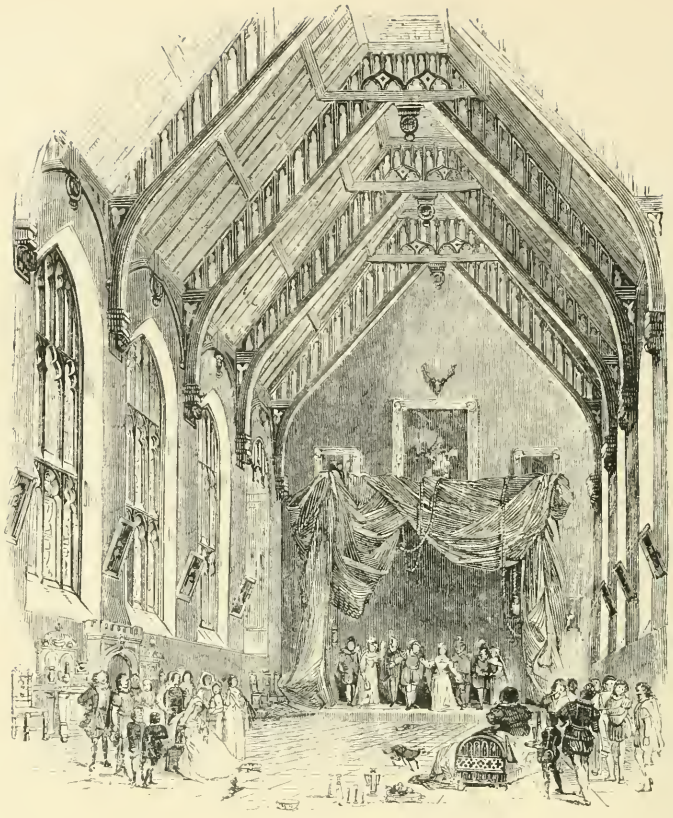
The stage-direction then says, "Enter two of the players with *packs at their backs*, and a boy." To the questions of the lord,—

> "Now, sirs, what store of plays have you?"—

the Clown answers, "Marry, my lord, you may have a tragical or a commodity, or what you will;" for which ignorance the other player rebukes the Clown, saying, "A comedy, thou shouldst say: zounds! thou 'lt shame us all." Whether this picture belongs to an earlier period of the stage than the similar scene in Shakspere's 'Induction,' or whether Shakspere was familiar with a better order of players, it is clear that in his scene the players appear as persons of somewhat more importance and are treated with more respect:—

> "*Lord.* Sirrah, go see what trumpet 't is that sounds:
> Belike, some noble gentleman, that means,
> Travelling some journey, to repose him here.
>
> *Re-enter a* Servant.
>
> How now? who is it?
> *Serv.* An it please your honour,
> Players, that offer service to your lordship.
> *Lord.* Bid them come near.
>
> *Enter* Players.
>
> Now, fellows, you are welcome.
> *Players.* We thank your honour.
> *Lord.* Do you intend to stay with me to-night?
> 2 *Play.* So please your lordship to accept our duty.
> *Lord.* With all my heart."

The lord, however, even in this scene, gives his order, "Take them to the buttery,"—a proof that the itinerant companies were classed little above menials.



[Itinerant Players.]

The welcome of a corporate town was perhaps as acceptable to the players of the Countess of Essex as the abundance of the esquire's kitchen; and so the people of Stratford are to be treated with the last novelty.

The play which is now to be performed is something very different from 'King Darius.' It is 'A Pleasant Comedie called Common Conditions.' This is neither a Mystery nor a Moral Play. It dispenses with impersonations of Good and Evil; Iniquity holds no controversy with Charity, and the Devil is not brought in to buffet or to be buffeted. The play is written in rhymed verse, and very ambitiously written. The matter is "set out with sweetness of words, fitness of epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, amphibologies, similitude."* It is a dramatized romance, of which the title expresses that it represents a possible aspect of human life; and the name of the chief character, Common Conditions, from which the play derives its title, would import that he does not belong to the supernatural or allegorical class of personages.† The audience of Stratford have anticipated something at which they

* Gosson. 'Plays Confuted,' second action.

† Mr. Collier, in his 'History of Dramatic Poetry,' expresses an opinion that the character of

are to laugh; and their mirth is much provoked when three tinkers appear upon the stage singing,

> "Hey tisty toisty, tinkers good fellows they be;
> In stopping of one hole, they use to make three."

These worthies are called Drift, Unthrift, and Shift; and, trade being bad with them, they agree to better it by a little robbing. Unthrift tells his companions,

> "But, masters, wot ye what? I have heard news about the court this day,
> That there is a gentleman with a lady gone away;
> And have with them a little parasite full of money and coin."

These travellers the tinkers agree to rob; and we have here an example of the readiness of the stage to indulge in satire. The purveyors who, a few years later, were denounced in parliament, are, we suppose, here pointed at. Shift says,

> "We will take away their purses, and say we do it by *commission*;"

to which Drift replies,

> "Who made a *commissioner* of you?
> If thou make no better answer at the bar, thou wilt hang, I tell thee true."

The gentleman and lady from the court, Sedmond and Clarisia, then come out of the wood, accompanied by their servant, Conditions. It appears that their father has long been absent, and they are travelling to seek him. Clarisia is heavy-hearted; and her brother thus consoles her, after the fashion of "epithets, metaphors, and hyperboles:"—

> "You see the chirping birds begin you melody to make,
> But you, ungrateful unto them, their pleasant voice forsake:
> You see the nightingale also, with sweet and pleasant lay,
> Sound forth her voice in chirping wise to banish care away.
> You see Dame Tellus, she with mantle fresh and green,
> For to display everywhere most comely to be seen;
> You see Dame Flora, she with flowers fresh and gay,
> Both here and there and everywhere, her banners to display."

The lady will have no comfort. She replies to her brother in a long echo to his speech, ending—

> "And therefore, brother, leave off talk; in vain you seem to prate:
> Not all the talk you utter can, my sorrows can abate."

Conditions ungallantly takes part against the lady, by a declamation in dispraise of women; which is happily cut short by the tinkers rushing in. Now indeed we have movement which will stir the audience. The brother escapes; the lady is bound to a tree: Conditions is to be hanged; but his adroitness, which is excessively diverting, altogether reminding one of another little knave, the Flibbertigibbet of Scott, is setting the Stratford audience in a roar. They

Common Conditions is the *Vice* of the performance. It appears to us, on the contrary, that the ordinary craft of a cunning knave—a little, restless, tricky servant—works out all the action, in the same way that the Vice had formerly interfered with it in the moral plays; but that he is essentially and purposely distinguished from the Vice. Mr. Collier also calls this play merely an interlude: it appears to us in its *outward form* to be as much a comedy as the Winter's Tale.

are realizing the description of Gosson,—"In the theatres they generally take up a wonderful laughter, and shout altogether with one voice when they see some notable cozenage practised."* When the tinkers have the noose round the neck of Conditions, he persuades them to let him hang himself, and to help him up in the tree to accomplish his determination. They consent; arguing that if he hangs himself they shall be free from the penalty of hanging him; and so into the tree he goes. Up the branches he runs like a squirrel, hallooing for help, whilst the heavy tinkers have no chance against his activity and his Sheffield knife. They finally make off; and Conditions releases his mistress. The next scene presents us Sedmond, the brother, alone. He laments the separation from his sister, and the uncertainty which he has of ever finding his father; and he expresses his grief and his determination in lines which seem to have rested upon the ear of one of that Stratford audience:—

> "But farewell now, my coursers brave, attrapped to the ground;
> Farewell, adieu, all pleasures eke, with comely hawk and hound:
> Farewell, ye nobles all; farewell each martial knight;
> Farewell, ye famous ladies all, in whom I did delight."

And, continuing his lament, he says,—

> "Adieu, my native soil; adieu, Arbaccas king;
> Adieu each wight and martial knight; adieu each living thing:
> Adieu my woful sire, and sister in like case,
> Whom never I shall see again each other to embrace;
> For now I will betake myself a wandering knight to be,
> Into some strange and foreign land, their comeliness to see."

When Conditions released the lady we learnt that the scene was Arabia:—

> "And, lady, it is not best for us in Arabia longer to tarry."

It is to Arabia, his native soil, that Sidmond bids adieu. But the Stratford audience learn by a very simple expedient that a change is to take place: a board is stuck up with the word "Phrygia" upon it, and a new character, Galiarbus, entereth "out of Phrygia." He is the father of the fugitives, who, banished from Arabia, has become rich, and obtained a lordship from the Duke of Phrygia; but he thinks of his children, and bitterly laments that they must never meet. Those children have arrived in Phrygia; for a new character appears, Lamphedon, the son of the Duke, who has fallen violently in love with a

* 'Plays Confuted,' &c.

† We have analysed this very curious comedy from the transcript in the Bodleian Library made under the direction of Malone from the only printed copy, and that an imperfect one, which is supposed to exist. In the page which contains the passage now given Malone has inserted the following foot-note, after quoting the celebrated lines in Othello, "Farewell the tranquil mind," &c. — "The coincidence is so striking that one is almost tempted to think that Shakspeare had read this wretched piece." It is scarcely necessary for us to point out how constantly the date of a play must be borne in mind to allow us to form any fair opinion of its merits. Malone himself considers that this play was printed about the year 1570, although we believe that this conjecture fixes the date at least ten years too early. It appears to us that it is a remarkable production even for 1580; and if, as a work of art, it be of little worth, it certainly contains the elements of the romantic drama, except the true poetical element, which could only be the result of extraordinary individual genius.

lady whom we know by his description to be Clarisia. Conditions has discovered that his mistress is equally in love with Lamphedon; all which circumstances are described and not rendered dramatic: and then Conditions, for his own advantage, brings the two lovers together, and they plight their troth, and are finally married. The lost brother, Sedmond, next makes his appearance under the name of Nomides; and with him a Phrygian lady, Sabia, has fallen in love. But her love is unrequited; she is rejected, and the uncourteous knight flies from her. Lamphedon and Clarisia are happy at the Duke's court; but Conditions, as it obscurely appears, wanting to be travelling again, has irritated the Duchess against her daughter-in-law, and they both, accompanied by Conditions, fly to take ship for Thracia. They fall in with pirates, who receive them on ship-board, having been secretly promised by Conditions that they will afford a good booty. We soon learn, by the appearance of Lamphedon, that they have thrown him overboard, and that he has lost his lady; but the pirates, who are by no means bad specimens of the English mariner, soon present themselves again, with a sea-song, which we transcribe; for assuredly it was fitted to rejoice the hearts of the playgoers of a maritime nation:—

"Lustily, lustily, lustily, let us sail forth;
The wind trim doth serve us, it blows from the north.

All things we have ready and nothing we want
To furnish our ship that rideth hereby;
Victuals and weapons they be nothing scant;
Like worthy mariners ourselves we will try.
Lustily, lustily, &c.

Her flags be new trimmed, set flaunting aloft;
Our ship for swift swimming, oh, she doth excel:
We fear no enemies, we have escaped them oft:
Of all ships that swimmeth, she beareth the bell.
Lustily, lustily, &c.

And here is a master excelleth in skill,
And our master's mate he is not to seek;
And here is a boatswain will do his good will,
And here is a ship, boy, we never had leak.
Lustily, lustily, &c.

If Fortune then fail not, and our next voyage prove,
We will return merrily and make good cheer,
And hold all together as friends link'd in love;
The cans shall be filled with wine, ale, and beer.
Lustily, lustily, &c."

The action of this comedy is conducted for the most part by description; an easier thing than the dramatic development of plot and character. Lamphedon falls in with the pirates, and by force of arms he compels them to tell him of the fate of his wife. She has been taken, it seems, by Conditions to be sold to Cardolus, an island chief; and then Lamphedon goes to fight Cardolus, and he does fight him, but finds not the lady. Conditions has however got rid of his charge, by persuading her to assume the name of Metræa, and enter the service of Leosthines. Hardship must have wonderfully changed her; for after a

time her brother, Sedmond, arrives under his assumed name, and becomes a candidate for her affections. The good old man under whose protection she remains has adopted her as his daughter. Lamphedon is on the way to seek her, accompanied by Conditions; and thus by accident, and by the intrigues of the knavish servant, all those are reunited who have suffered in separation: for Leosthines is the banished father.* How Conditions is disposed of is not so clear. He is constantly calling himself a little knave, and a crafty knave, a parasite, a turncoat; and he says,

> "Conditions? nay, double Conditions is my name,
> That for my own advantage such dealings can frame."

It is difficult to discover what advantage he derives from his trickiness, yet he has always a new trick. It is probable that he was personated by some diminutive performer, whose grimaces and ugliness would make the audience roar with delight. The tinkers in the first scene say they know not what to do with him, except to "set him to keep crows." The object of the writer of the comedy, if he had any object, would appear to be to show that the purposes of craft may produce results entirely unexpected by the crafty one, and that happiness may be finally obtained through the circumstances which appear most to impede its attainment. This comedy is remarkable for containing none of the ribaldry which was so properly objected to in the plays of the early stage. It is characterised, also, by the absence of that melo-dramatic extravagance which belonged to this period, exhibiting power, indeed, but not the power of real art. These extravagances are well described by the author of 'The Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres;' although his notion that an effort of imagination, and a lie, are the same thing is very characteristic:—"The writers of our time are so led away with vain glory that their only endeavour is to pleasure the humour of men, and rather with vanity to content their minds than to profit them with good ensample. The notablest liar is become the best poet; he that can make the most notorious lie, and disguise falsehood in such sort that he may pass unperceived, is held the best writer. For the strangest comedy brings greatest delectation and pleasure. Our nation is led away with vanity, which the author perceiving, frames himself with novelties and strange trifles to content the vain humours of his rude auditors, feigning countries never heard of, monsters and prodigious creatures that are not: as of the Arimaspie, of the Grips, the Pigmies, the Cranes, and other such notorious lies." Sidney, writing of the same period of the drama, speaks of the apparition of "a hideous monster with fire and smoke."† And Gosson, having direct reference to some romantic dramas formed upon romances and legendary tales, as 'Common Conditions' was, says, "Sometimes you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible monster made of brown paper; and at his return is so wonderfully changed, that he cannot be known but by some posy in his

* A leaf or two is lost of the original copy, but enough remains to let us see how the plot will end. We learn that Nomides repents of his rejection of Sabia.

† 'Defence of Poesy.'

tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of a cockle-shell."* When the true masters of the romantic drama arose, they found the people prepared for the transformation of the ridiculous into the poetical.

If there was amongst that audience at Stratford, in 1580, witnessing the performance of 'Common Conditions,' one in whom the poetical feeling was rapidly developing, and whose taste had been formed upon better models than anything which the new drama could offer to him—such a one perhaps was there in the person of William Shakspere—he would perceive how imperfectly this comedy attained the end of giving delight to a body of persons assembled together with an aptitude for delight. And yet they were pleased and satisfied. There was in this comedy bustle and change of scene; something to move the feelings in the separation of lovers and their re-union; laughter excited by grotesqueness which stood in the place of wit and humour; music and song; and, more than all, lofty words and rhymed cadences which sounded like poetry. But to that one critical listener the total absence of the real dramatic spirit would be most perplexing. At the moment when he himself would be fancying what the characters upon the scene were about to do,—how their discourse, like that of real life, would have reference to the immediate business of the action in which they were engaged, and explain their own feelings, passions, peculiarities,—the writer would present, through the mouth of some one of these characters, a description of what some one else was doing or had done; and thus, though the poem was a dialogue, it was not to his sense a drama; it did not realize the principle of personation which his mind was singularly formed to understand and cultivate. The structure of the versification, too, would appear to him altogether unfit to represent the thoughts and emotions of human beings engaged in working out a natural train of adventures. Some elevation of style would be required to distinguish the language from that of ordinary life, without being altogether opposed to that language; something that would convey the idea of poetical art, whilst it was sufficiently real not to make the art too visible. He had diligently read 'The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex;' and the little volume printed in 1571, containing that play "as the same was showed on the stage before the Queen's Majesty, about nine year past, by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple," was a precious volume to him; for it gave to him the most complete specimen of that species of verse which appeared fitted for the purposes of the higher drama. The speeches were indeed long, after the model of the stately harangues which he had read in his 'Livy' and 'Sallust;' but they were forcible and impressive; and he had often upon his lips those lines on the causes and miseries of civil war of which our history had furnished such fearful examples:—

> "And thou, O Britain! whilom in renown,
> Whilom in wealth and fame, shalt thus be torn,
> Dismember'd thus, and thus be rent in twain,
> Thus wasted and defac'd, spoil'd and destroy'd:
> These be the fruits your civil wars will bring.

* 'Plays Confuted.'

Hereto it comes, when kings will not consent
To grave advice, but follow wilful will.
This is the end, when in fond princes' hearts
Flattery prevails, and sage rede hath no place.
These are the plagues, when murder is the mean
To make new heirs unto the royal crown.
Thus wreak the gods, when that the mother's wrath
Naught but the blood of her own child may 'suage
These mischiefs spring when rebels will arise,
To work revenge, and judge their prince's fact.
This, this ensues, when noble men do fail
In loyal truth, and subjects will be kings.
And this doth grow, when, lo! unto the prince,
Whom death or sudden hap of life bereaves,
No certain heir remains; such certain heir
As not all only is the rightful heir,
But to the realm is so made known to be,
And truth thereby vested in subjects' hearts."

Even this versification he would think might be improved. The entire play of 'Ferrex and Porrex,' was to him monotonous and uninteresting; it seemed as if the dramatic form oppressed the undoubted genius of one of the authors of that play. How inferior were the finest lines which Sackville wrote in this play, correct and perspicuous as they were, compared with some of the noble bursts in the Induction to 'A Mirror for Magistrates'! Surely the author of the sublime impersonation of War could have written a tragedy that would have filled the heart with terror, if not with pity!—

"Lastly stood War in glittering arms yclad,
With visage grim, stern looks, and blackly hued;
In his right hand a naked sword he had
That to the hilts was all with blood imbrued;
And in his left (that kings and kingdoms rued)
Famine and Fire he held, and therewithal
He razed towns, and threw down towers and all."

Still, he wondered that the example which Sackville had given of dramatic blank verse had not been followed by the writers of plays for the common theatres. He saw, however, that a change was taking place; for the First Part of 'Promos and Cassandra,' of which he had recently obtained a copy, was wholly in rhyme; while in the Second Part, Master George Whetstone had freely introduced blank verse. In the little book which Stephen Gosson had just written against plays,—his second book in answer to Thomas Lodge,—which had been lent him to read by a zealous minister of the church who disapproved of such vanities, he found an evidence that the multitude most delighted in rhyme: "The poets send their verses to the stage, upon such feet as continually are rolled up in rhyme at the fingers' ends, which is plausible to the barbarous and carrieth a sting into the ears of the common people."* And yet, from another passage of the same writer, he might collect that even the refined and learned were delighted with the poetical structure of the common

* 'Plays Confuted, in Five Actions.'

dramas: "So subtle is the devil, that under the colour of recreation in London, and of exercise of learning in the universities, by seeing of plays, he maketh us to join with the Gentiles in their corruption. Because the sweet numbers of poetry, flowing in verse, do wonderfully tickle the hearers' ears, the devil hath tied this to most of our plays, that whatsoever he would have stick fast to our souls might slip down in sugar by this enticement, for that which delighteth never troubleth our swallow. Thus, when any matter of love is interlarded, though the thing itself be able to allure us, yet it is so set out with sweetness of words, fitness of epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, amphibologies, similitude; with phrases so picked, so pure, so proper; with action so smooth, so lively, so wanton; that the poison, creeping on secretly without grief, chokes us at last, and hurleth us down in a dead sleep." It was difficult to arrive at an exact knowledge of the truth from the description of one who wrote under such strong excitement as Master Stephen Gosson.

The controversy upon the lawfulness of stage-plays was a remarkable feature of the period which we are now describing; and, as pamphlets were to that age what newspapers are to ours, there can be little doubt that even in the small literary society of Stratford the tracts upon this subject might be well known. The dispute about the Theatre was a contest between the holders of opposite opinions in religion. The Puritans, who even at that time were strong in their zeal if not in their numbers, made the Theatre the especial object of their indignation, for its unquestionable abuses allowed them so to frame their invectives that they might tell with double force against every description of public amusement, against poetry in general, against music, against dancing, associated as they were with the excesses of an ill-regulated stage. A Treatise of John Northbrooke, licensed for the press in 1577, is directed against "dicing, dancing, vain plays, or interludes." Gosson, who had been a student of Christchurch, Oxford, had himself written two or three plays previous to his publication, in 1579, of 'The School of Abuse, containing a Pleasant Invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and such-like Caterpillars of a Commonwealth.' This book, written with considerable ostentation of learning, and indeed with no common vigour and occasional eloquence, defeats its own purposes by too large an aim. Poets, whatever be the character of their poetry, are the objects of Gosson's new-born hostility:—"Tiberias the Emperor saw somewhat when he judged Scaurus to death for writing a tragedy; Augustus when he banished Ovid; and Nero when he charged Lucan to put up his pipes, to stay his pen, and write no more." Music comes in for the same denunciation, upon the authority of Pythagoras, who "condemns them for fools that judge music by sound and ear." The three abuses of the time are held to be inseparable:—"As poetry and piping are cousin-germans, so piping and playing are of great affinity, and all three chained in links of abuse." It is not to be thought that declamation like this would produce any great effect in turning a poetical mind from poetry, or that even Master Gosson's contrast of the "manners of England in old time" and "New England" would go far to move a patriotic indignation against modern refinements. We have, on one hand, Dion's description how Englishmen "went naked and were

good soldiers; they fed upon roots and barks of trees; they would stand up to the chin many days in marshes without victuals;" and, on the other hand, "but the exercise that is now among us is banqueting, playing, piping, and dancing, and all such delights as may win us to pleasure, or rock us in sleep. *Quantum mutatus ab illo!*" If the young Shakspere had his ambition turned towards dramatic poetry when he was sixteen, that ambition was not likely to be damped by Gosson's general declamation; and in truth in this his first tract the worthy man has a sneaking kindness for the theatre which he can with difficulty suppress:—"As some of the players are far from abuse, so some of their plays are without rebuke, which are easily remembered, as quickly reckoned. The two prose books played at the Bell Savage, where you shall find never a word without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vain. 'The Jew,' and 'Ptolemy,' shown at the Bull; the one representing the greediness of worldly choosers, and bloody minds of usurers; the other very lively describing how seditious estates with their own devices, false friends with their own swords, and rebellious commons in their own snares are overthrown; neither with amorous gestures wounding the eye, nor with slovenly talk hurting the ears of the chaste hearers. 'The Blacksmith's Daughter,' and 'Catiline's Conspiracies,' usually brought in at the Theatre: the first containing the treachery of Turks, the honourable bounty of a noble mind, the shining of virtue in distress. The last, because it is known to be a pig of mine own sow, I will speak the less of it; only giving you to understand that the whole mark which I shot at in that work was to show the reward of traitors in Catiline, and the necessary government of learned men in the person of Cicero, which foresees every danger that is likely to happen, and forestalls it continually ere it take effect."

The praise of the "two prose books at the Bell Savage," that contained "never a word without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vain," is quite sufficient to show us that these prose books exhibited neither character nor passion. The 'Ptolemy' and the 'Catiline' there can be no doubt were composed of a succession of tedious monologues, having nothing of the principle of dramatic art in them, although in their outward form they appeared to be dramas. Gosson says, "These plays are good plays and sweet plays, and of all plays the best plays, and most to be liked, worthy to be sung of the Muses, or set out with the cunning of Roscius himself; *yet are they not fit for every man's diet, neither ought they commonly to be shown.*" It is clear that these good plays and sweet plays had not in themselves any of the elements of popularity; *therefore* they were utterly barren of real poetry. The highest poetry is essentially the popular poetry: it is universal in its range, it is unlimited in its duration. The lowest poetry (if poetry it can be called) is conventional; it lives for a little while in narrow corners, the pet thing of fashion or of pedantry. When Gosson wrote, the poetry of the English drama was not yet born; and the people contented themselves with something else that was nearer poetry than the plays which were "not fit for every man's diet." Gosson, in his second tract which, provoked by the answer of Lodge to his 'School of Abuse,' is written with much more virulence against plays especially, thus describes

what the people most delighted in: "As the devil hath brought in all that Poetry can sing, so hath he sought out every strain that Music is able to pipe and drawn all kinds of instruments into that compass, simple and mixed. For the eye, beside the beauty of the houses and the stages, he sendeth in garish apparel, masks, vaulting, tumbling, dancing of jigs, galiards, morisces, hobby-horses, showing of juggling casts; nothing forgot that might serve to set out the matter with pomp, or ravish the beholders with variety of pleasure." Lodge, in his reply to Gosson's 'School of Abuse,' had indirectly acknowledged the want of moral purpose in the stage exhibitions; but he contends that, as the ancient satirists were reformers of manners, so might plays be properly directed to the same end. "Surely we want not a Roscius, neither are there great scarcity of Terence's profession: but yet our men dare not now-a-days presume so much as the old poets might; *and therefore they apply their writings to the people's vein;* whereas, if in the beginning they had ruled, we should now-a-days have found small spectacles of folly, but of truth. . . . . You say, unless the thing be taken away the vice will continue; nay, I say, *if the style were changed* the practice would profit." To this argument, that the Theatre might become a censor of manners, Gosson thus replies: "If the common people which resort to theatres, being but an assembly of tailors, tinkers, cordwainers, sailors, old men, young men, women, boys, girls, and such-like, be the judges of faults there pointed out, the rebuking of manners in that place is neither lawful nor convenient, but to be held for a kind of libelling and defaming." * The notion which appears to have possessed the minds of the writers against the stage at this period is, that a fiction and a lie were the same.† Gosson says, "The perfectest image is that which maketh the thing to seem neither greater nor less than indeed it is; but in plays, either the things are feigned that never were, as Cupid and Psyche played at Paul's, and a great many comedies more at the Blackfriars, and in every playhouse in London, which, for brevity sake, I overskip; or, if a true history be taken in hand, it is made like our shadows, longest at the rising and fall of the sun; shortest of all at high noon."

The notion evidently was, that nothing ought to be presented upon the stage but what was an historical fact; that *all* the points belonging to such a history should be given; and that no art should be used in setting it forth beyond that necessary to give the audience, not to make them comprehend, all the facts. It is quite clear that such a process will present us little of the poetry or the philosophy of history. The play-writers of 1580, weak masters as they were, knew their art better than Gosson; they made history attractive by changing

* 'Plays Confuted,' &c. The Shakspere Society reprinted in one volume 'The School of Abuse, first published in 1579, and Heywood's 'Apology for Actors,' first published in 1612. These publications belong to different periods. The controversy of the first period was presented more completely by Lodge's answer to Gosson, by Gosson's 'Plays Confuted' in reply to Lodge, and by the Second and Third 'Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres,' the author of which counted 'The School of Abuse' the First Blast. These tracts are exceedingly rare, and they open to us clearer notions of the early stage than any other contemporary productions.

† See Note at the end of this chapter.

it into a melo-drama:—"The poets drive it (a true history) most commonly unto such points as may best show the majesty of their pen in tragical speeches or set the heroes agog with discourses of love, or paint a few antics to fit their own humours with scoffs and taunts, or bring in a show to furnish the stage when it is bare. When the matter of itself comes short of this, they follow the practice of the cobbler, and set their teeth to the leather to pull it out. So was the history of 'Cæsar and Pompey,' and the play of 'The Fabii,' at the theatre both amplified there where the drums might walk or the pen ruffle. When the history swelled or ran too high for the number of the persons who should play it, the poet with Proteus cut the same to his own measure: when it afforded no pomp at all, he brought it to the rack to make it serve. Which invincibly proveth on my side that plays are no images of truth." The author of 'The Blast of Retreat,' who describes himself as formerly "a great affector of that vain art of play-making," charges the authors of historical plays not only with expanding and curtailing the action, so as to render them no images of truth, but with changing the historical facts altogether:—"If they write of histories that are known, as the life of Pompey, the martial affairs of Cæsar, and other worthies, they give them a new face, and turn them out like counterfeits to show themselves on the stage." From the author of 'The Blast of Retreat' we derive the most accurate account of those comedies of intrigue of which none have come down to us from this early period of the drama. We might fancy he was describing the productions of Mrs. Behn or Mrs. Centlivre, in sentences that might appear to be quoted from Jeremy Collier's attacks upon the stage more than a century later:—"Some, by taking pity upon the deceitful tears of the stage-lovers, have been moved by their complaint to rue on their secret friends, whom they have thought to have tasted like torment: some, having noted the ensamples how maidens restrained from the marriage of those whom their friends have misliked, have there learned a policy to prevent their parents by stealing them away: some, seeing by ensample of the stage-player one carried with too much liking of another man's wife, having noted by what practice she has been assailed and overtaken, have not failed to put the like in effect in earnest that was afore shown in jest. . . . . The device of carrying and re-carrying letters by laundresses, practising with pedlars to transport their tokens by colourable means to sell their merchandise, and other kind of policies to beguile fathers of their children, husbands of their wifes, guardians of their wards, and masters of their servants, is it not aptly taught in 'The School of Abuse'?"* Perhaps the worst abuse of the stage of this period was the licence of the clown or fool—an abuse which the greatest and the most successful of dramatic writers found it essential to denounce and put down. The author of 'The Blast of Retreat' has described this vividly:—"And all be [although] these pastimes were not, as they are, to be condemned simply of their own nature, yet because they are so abused they are abominable. For the Fool no sooner showeth himself in his colours, to make men merry, but straightway lightly there followeth some vanity, not only superfluous, but beastly and wicked. Yet

* The editor of the tract appends a note:—"He meaneth plays, who are not unfitly so called."

we, so carried away by his unseemly gesture and unreverenced scorning, that we seem only to be delighted in him, and are not content to sport ourselves with modest mirth, as the matter gives occasion, unless it be intermixed with knavery, drunken merriments, crafty cunnings, undecent jugglings, clownish conceits, and such other cursed mirth, as is both odious in the sight of God, and offensive to honest ears."

In the controversial writers of the period immediately before us we find no direct mention of those Histories, "borrowed out of our English chronicles, wherein our forefathers' valiant acts that have been long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books are revived, and they themselves raised from the grave of oblivion and brought to plead their aged honours in open presence." This is a description of the early chronicle histories of the stage, as given by Thomas Nashe in 1592; and although we believe that in this description some of the plays of Shakspere himself would necessarily be included, it can scarcely be imagined that he was altogether the inventor of this most attractive as well as most obvious species of drama. Whilst the writers for the stage previous to 1580 were reproducing every variety of ancient history and fable, it is not likely that they would have entirely neglected the copious materials which the history of their own country would present to them. Nashe in another passage says, "What a glorious thing it is to have King Henry V. represented on the stage leading the French King prisoner, and forcing both him and the Dauphin to swear fealty!" Something like this dramatic action is to be found in one of these elder historical plays which have come down to us, 'The Famous Victories of Henry V., containing the Honourable Battle of Agincourt.' The only other English historical play that can be safely assigned to the dramatic period before Shakspere is 'The True Tragedy of Richard III.'* It has been already necessary for us to notice 'The Famous Victories' somewhat fully in connexion with Shakspere's plays of King Henry IV., and King Henry V., but the view which we are here endeavouring to give of the state of the early stage would be essentially incomplete, were we to pass over a class of dramas so important in themselves, and so interesting in connexion with what we may believe to have been the earliest productions of Shakspere's dramatic genius, as the English Histories; and of these 'The Famous Victories' is an authentic and a very curious example.†

There is a full audience collected in the Town Hall of Stratford, to witness the new performance of the Earl of Darby's players. Slight preparation will be necessary for the performance, although the history to be performed will be a regal story; its scenes changing from the tavern to the palace, from England to France; now exhibiting the wild Prince striking the representative of his father on the seat of justice, and then after a little while the same Prince a hero and a conqueror. The raised floor at the upper end of the Town Hall will furnish ample room for all these displays. The painted board will lead

* See the Notices of Richard III. in the fourth volume of this edition.

† The play of 'The Famous Victories' was not printed till 1594; but there is no doubt that the celebrated Tarleton, who died in 1588, played the clown in it; and it is reasonably assigned to the period of which we are writing.

the imagination of the audience from one country to another; and when the honourable battle of Agincourt is to be fought, "two armies fly in represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?"* The curtain is removed, and without preparation we encounter the Prince in the midst of his profligacy. Ned and Tom are his companions; and when the Prince says, "Think you not that it was a villainous part of me to rob my father's receivers?" Ned very charitably answers, "Why no, my lord, it was but a trick of youth." Sir John Oldcastle, who passes by the familiar name of Jockey, joins this pleasant company, and he informs the Prince that the town of Deptford has risen with hue and cry after the Prince's man who has robbed a poor carrier. The accomplished Prince then meets with the receivers whom he has robbed; and, after bestowing upon them the names of villains and rascals, he drives them off with a threat that if they say a word about the robbery he will have them hanged. With their booty, then, will they go to the tavern in Eastcheap, upon the invitation of the Prince:—"We are all fellows, I tell you, sirs; an the king my father were dead, we would be all kings." The scene is now London, with John Cobbler, Robin Pewterer, and Lawrence Costermonger keeping watch and ward in the accustomed style of going to sleep. There is short rest for them; for Derrick, the carrier who has been robbed by the Prince's servant, is come to London to seek his goods. But why does the Stratford audience begin to roll about in a phrenzy of laughter, which waits not for laughter-moving words, but is set on by a look or a gesture, more irresistible than words? It is Tarleton, the famous Clown, who plays the Kentish carrier; and he is in high humour to-night. It matters little what the author of the play has written down for him, for his "wondrous plentiful pleasant extemporal wit" will do much better for the amusement of his audience than the dull dialogue of the prompt-books. In the scene before us he has to catch the thief, and to take him before the Lord Chief Justice; and when the Court is set in order, and the Chief Justice cries, "Gaoler, bring the prisoner to the bar," Derrick speaks according to the book,—"Hear you, my lord, I pray you bring the bar to the prisoner;" but what he adds, having this hint for a clown's licence, soon renders the Chief Justice a very insignificant personage. The real wit of Tarleton probably did much to render the dullness of the early stage endurable by persons of any refinement. Henry Chettle, in his curious production 'Kind-Hartes Dreame,' written about four years after Tarleton's death, thus describes his appearance in a vision:—"The next, by his suit of russet, his buttoned cap, his tabor, his standing on the toe, and other tricks, I knew to be either the body or resemblance of Tarleton, who living, for his pleasant conceits was of all men liked, and dying, for mirth left not his fellow."† The Prince

* Sidney. 'Defence of Poesy.'

† From the 'Palladis Tamia' of Francis Meres we learn that Dr. John Case, the commentator upon Aristotle, did not think Tarleton beneath his notice:—"As Antipater Sidonius was famous for extemporal verse in Greek, and Ovid for his 'Quicquid conabar dicere versus erat,' so was our Tarleton, of whom Dr. Case, that learned physician, thus speaketh in the seventh book and seventeenth chapter of his 'Politics:'—'Aristoteles summe Theodoretum laudavit quendam peritum tragœ-

enters and demands the release of his servant, which the Chief Justice refuses. The scene which ensues when the Prince strikes the Chief Justice is a remarkable example of the poetical poverty of the early stage. In the representation the action would of course be exciting, but the dialogue which accompanies it is beyond comparison bald and meaningless. The audience was, however, compensated by Tarleton's iteration of the scene:—"Faith, John, I'll tell thee what; thou shalt be my lord chief justice, and thou shalt sit in the chair; and I'll be the young prince, and hit thee a box on the ear; and then thou shalt say, To teach you what prerogatives mean, I commit you to the Fleet." The Prince is next presented really in prison, where he is visited by Sir John Oldcastle. The Prince, in his dialogue with Jockey, Ned, and Tom, again exhibits himself as the basest and most vulgar of ruffians; but, hearing his father is sick, he goes to Court, and the bully, in the twinkling of an eye, becomes a saintly hypocrite:—"Pardon me, sweet father, pardon me; good my lord of Exeter, speak for me: pardon me, pardon, good father: not a word: ah, he will not speak one word: ah, Harry, now thrice unhappy Harry. But what shall I do? I will go take me into some solitary place, and there lament my sinful life, and, when I have done, I will lay me down and die." The scene where the Prince removes the crown, poor as it is in poetical conception, touches the Stratford audience; and there is one there who fancies he could extemporize that scene into something more touching. Henry IV. dies; Henry V. is crowned; the evil companions are cast off; the Chief Justice is forgiven; and the expedition to France is resolved upon. To trace the course of the war would be too much for the patience of our readers. The clashing of the four swords and bucklers might have rendered its stage representation endurable, and Derrick has become a soldier. This is the wit set down for him:—

> "*Derrick.* I was four or five times slain.
>
> *John.* Four or five times slain! Why, how couldst thou have been alive now?
>
> *Derrick.* O John, never say so, for I was called the bloody soldier amongst them all.
>
> *John.* Why, what didst thou?
>
> *Derrick.* Why, I will tell thee, John: every day when I went into the field, I would take a straw, and thrust it into my nose, and make my nose bleed; and then I would go into the field; and when the captain saw me, he would say, Peace, ah bloody soldier; and bid me stand aside, whereof I was glad."

The scene which Nashe represented as a glorious thing does not violate the historical fact in making Henry lead the French king prisoner; but there is a swearing of fealty in which the Dauphin participates:—

> "*Henry V.* Well, my good brother of France, there is one thing I must needs desire.
>
> *French King.* What is that, my good brother of England?
>
> *Henry V.* That all your nobles must be sworn to be true to me.

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diarum actorem; Cicero suum Roscium; nos Angli Tarletonum, in cujus voce et vultu omnes jocosi affectus, in cujus cerebroso capite lepidæ facetiæ habitant.'"

French King. Whereas they have not stuck with greater matters, I know they will not stick with such a trifle: begin you with my lord duke of Burgundy.

Henry V. Come, my lord of Burgundy, take your oath upon my sword.

Burgundy. I, Philip duke of Burgundy, swear to Henry king of England to be true to him, and to become his league-man; and that, if I, Philip, hear of any foreign power coming to invade the said Henry, or his heirs, then I, the said Philip, to send him word, and aid him with all the power I can make; and thereunto I take my oath.

[*He kisseth the sword.*

Henry V. Come, prince Dolphin, you must swear too.

[*He kisseth the sword.*"

It was about the period which we are now touching upon that Sidney wrote his Defence of Poesy.' The drama was then as he has described it, "much used in England, and none can be more pitifully abused; which, like an unmannerly daughter showing a bad education, causeth her mother Poesy's honour to be called in question." The early framers of the drama seem scarcely to have considered that she was the daughter of Poesy. A desire for dramatic exhibitions—not a new desire, but taking a new direction—had forcibly seized upon the English people. The demand was to be supplied as it best might be, by the players who were to profit by it. They were, as they always will be, the best judges of what would please an audience; and it was to be expected that, having within themselves the power of constructing the rude plot of any popular story, so as to present rapid movement, and what in the language of the stage is called business, the beauty or even propriety of the dialogue would be a secondary consideration, and indeed would be pretty much left to the extemporal invention of the actor. That the wit of the clown was almost entirely of this nature we have the most distinct evidence. Sidney, with all his fine taste, was a stickler for "place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For," he says, "where the stage should always represent one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined." As the players were the rude builders of our early drama, and as that drama was founded upon the ruder Mysteries and Moral Plays, in which all propriety was disregarded, so that the senses could be gratified, they naturally rejected the unities of time and place, the observance of which would have deprived their plays of their chief attraction—rapid change and abundant incident. And fortunate was it that they did so; for they thus went on strengthening and widening the foundations of our national drama, the truth and freedom of which could not exist under a law which is not the law of nature. Had Sidney lived five or six years longer, had he seen or read Romeo and Juliet, or A Midsummer-Night's Dream, he would probably have ceased to regard the drama as the unmannerly daughter of Poesy; he would in all likelihood have thought that something was gained even through the "defectuous circumstances" that spurn the bounds of time and place, and compel the imagination to be still or to travel at its bidding, to be utterly regardless of the

halt or the march of events, so that one dominant idea possess the soul and sway all its faculties. But this was only to be effected when a play was to become a great work of art; when all the conditions of its excellence should be fully comprehended; when it should unite the two main conditions of the highest excellence—that of subjecting the popular mind to its power, through the skill which only the most refined understanding can altogether appreciate. When the young man of Stratford, who, as we have conceived, knew the drama of his time through the representations of itinerant players, heard the rude dialogue of 'The Famous Victories' not altogether without delight, and laughed most heartily at the extemporal pleasantness of the witty clown, a vivid though an imperfect notion of the excellence that might be attained by working up such common materials upon a principle of art must assuredly have been developed in his mind. If Sidney's noble defence of his beloved Poesy had then been published, he would, we think, have found in it a reflection of his own opinions as to the "bad education" of the drama. "All their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion: so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained." The objection here is scarcely so much to the mingling kings and clowns, when "the matter so carrieth," as to the thrusting in the clown by head and shoulders. Upon a right principle of art the familiar and the heroic might be advantageously blended. Here, in this play of 'The Famous Victories,' the Prince was not only prosaic, but altogether brutalized, so that the transition from the ruffian to the hero was distasteful and unnatural. But surround the same Prince with companions whose profligacy was in some sort balanced and counteracted by their intellectual energy, their wit, their genial mirthfulness; make the Prince a gentleman in the midst of his most wanton levity; and the transition to the hero is not merely probable, it is graceful in itself, it satisfies expectation. But the young poet is yet without models, and he will remain so. He has to work out his own theory of art; but that theory must be gradually and experimentally formed. He has the love of country living in his soul as a presiding principle. There are in his country's annals many stories such as this of Henry V. that might be brought upon the stage to raise "heroes from the grave of oblivion," for glorious example to "these degenerate days." But in those annals are also to be found fit subjects for "the high and excellent tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants to manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affections of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilded roofs are builded." * As the young poet left the Town Hall of Stratford he would forget Tarleton and his tricks; he would think that an English historical play was yet to be written; perhaps, as the ambitious thought crossed his mind to undertake such a task, the noble lines of Sackville would be present to his memory:—

* Sidney. 'Defence of Poesy.'

"And sorrowing I to see the summer flowers,
The lively green, the lusty leas forlorn,
The sturdy trees so shatter'd with the showers.
The fields so fade that flourish'd so beforn;
It taught me well all earthly things be born
To die the death, for nought long time may last;
The summer's beauty yields to winter's blast.

Then looking upward to the heaven's leams,
With night's stars thick-powdered everywhere,
Which erst so glisten'd with the golden streams
That cheerful Phœbus spread down from his sphere,
Beholding dark oppressing day so near:
The sudden sight reduced to my mind
The sundry changes that in earth we find.

That musing on this worldly wealth in thought,
Which comes and goes more faster than we see
The flickering flame that with the fire is wrought.
My busy mind presented unto me
Such fall of peers as in this realm had be:
That oft I wish'd some would their woes descrive,
To warn the rest whom fortune left alive."

[Thomas Sackville.]

NOTE ON SIDNEY'S 'DEFENCE OF POESY.'

It has scarcely, we think, been noticed that the justly-celebrated work of Sir Philip Sidney forms an important part of the controversy, not only against the Stage, but against Poetry and Music, that appears to have commenced in England a little previous to 1580. Gosson, as we have seen, attacks the Stage, not only for its especial abuses, but because it partakes of the general infamy of Poetry. According to this declaimer, it is "the whole practice of poets, either with fables to show their abuses, or with plain terms to unfold their mischief, discover their shame, discredit themselves, and disperse their poison throughout the world." Gosson dedicated his 'School of Abuse' to Sidney; and Spenser, in one of his letters to Gabriel Harvey, shows how Sidney received the compliment:—"New books I hear of none; but only of one that, writing a certain book called 'The School of Abuse,' and dedicating it to Master Sidney, was for his labour scorned; if, at least, it be in the goodness of that nature to scorn. Such folly is it not to regard aforehand *the inclination* and quality of him to whom we dedicate our books." We have no doubt that the 'Defence of Poesy,' or, as it was first called, 'An Apology for Poetry,' was intended as a reply to the dedicator. There is every reason to believe that it was written in 1581. Sidney can scarcely avoid pointing at Gosson when he speaks of the "Poet-haters," as of "people who seek a praise by dispraising others," that they "do prodigally spend a great many wandering words in quips and scoffs, carping and taunting at each thing which, by stirring the spleen, may stay the brain from a thorough beholding the worthiness of the subject." We have seen how the early fanatical writers against the stage held that a Poet and a Liar were synonymous. To this ignorant invective, calculated for the lowest understandings, Sidney gives a brief and direct answer:—"That they should be the principal liars, I answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar, and though he would, as a poet, can scarcely be a liar. The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars. How often, think you, do the physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses, which afterwards send Charon a great number of souls drowned in a potion before they come to his ferry? And no less of the rest which take upon them to affirm: Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth; for, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false: So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies: But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth, the poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth: He citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry calleth the sweet Muses to aspire unto him a good invention: In troth, not labouring to to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not, unless we will say that Nathan lied in his speech, before alleged, to David; which as a wicked man durst scarce say, so think I none so simple would say that Æsop lied in the tales of his beasts; for who thinketh that Æsop wrote it for actually true were well worthy to have his name chronicled among the beasts he writeth of. What child is there that, coming to play and seeing 'Thebes' written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive to the child's age, to know that the poet's persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively, but allegorically and figuratively, written; and therefore, as in history, looking for truth, they may go away full fraught with false hood, so in poesy, looking but for fiction, they shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plat of a profitable invention."

[Guy's Cliff in the 17th Century.]

CHAPTER XI.

LIVING IN THE PAST.

The earliest, and the most permanent, of poetical associations are those which are impressed upon the mind by localities which have a deep historical interest. It would be difficult to find a district possessing more striking remains of a past time than the neighbourhood in which William Shakspere spent his youth. The poetical feeling which the battle-fields, and castles, and monastic ruins of mid England would excite in him, may be reasonably considered to have derived an intensity through the real history of these celebrated spots being vague, and for the most part traditional. The age of local historians had not yet arrived. The monuments of the past were indeed themselves much more fresh and perfect than in the subsequent days, when every tomb inscription was copied, and every mouldering document set forth. But in the year 1580, if William Shakspere desired to know, or example, with some precision, the history which belonged to those noble towers of Warwick upon which he had often gazed

with a delight that scarcely required to be based upon knowledge, he would look in vain for any guide to his inquiries. Some old people might tell him that they remembered their fathers to have spoken of one John Rous, the son of Geffrey Rous of Warwick, who, having diligently studied at Oxford, and obtained a reputation for uncommon learning, rejected all ambitious thoughts, shut himself up with his books in the solitude of Guy's Cliff, and was engaged to the last in writing the Chronicles of his country, and especially the history of his native County and its famous Earls: and there, in the quiet of that pleasant place, performing his daily offices of devotion as a chantry priest in the little chapel, did John Rous live a life of happy industry till 1491. But the world in general derived little advantage from his labours. Another came after him, commissioned by royal authority to search into all the archives of the kingdom, and to rescue from damp and dust all ancient manuscripts, civil and ecclesiastical. The commission of Leland was well performed; but his 'Itinerary' was also to be of little use to his own generation. William Shakspere knew not what Leland had written about Warwickshire; how the enthusiastic and half-poetical antiquary had described, in elegant Latinity, the beauties of woodland and river; and had even given the characteristics of such a place as Guy's Cliff in a few happy words, that would still be an accurate description of its natural features, even after the lapse of three centuries. Caves hewn in the living rock, a thick overshadowing wood, sparkling springs, flowery meadows-mossy grottos, the river rolling over the stones with a gentle noise, solitude and the quiet most friendly to the Muses,—these are the enduring features of the place

[Chapel at Guy's Cliff.]

as painted by the fine old topographer.* But his manuscripts were as sealed to the young Shakspere as those of John Rous. Yet if the future Poet sustained some disadvantage by living before the days of antiquarian minuteness, he could still dwell in the past, and people it with the beings of his own imagination. The Chroniclers who had as yet attempted to collect and systematize the records of their country did not aim at any very great exactness either of time or place. When they dealt with a remote antiquity they were as fabulous as the poets themselves; and it was easy to see that they most assumed the appearance of exactness when they wrote of times which have left not a single monumental record. Very diffuse were they when they had to talk of the days of Brute. Intimately could they decipher the private history of Albanact and Humber. The fatal passion of Locrine for Elstride was more familiar to them than that of Henry for Rosamond Clifford, or Edward for Elizabeth Woodville. Of the cities and the gates of King Lud they could present a most accurate description. Of King Leir very exact was their narration: how he, the son of Baldud, "was made ruler over the Britons the year of the world 4338; was noble of conditions, and guided his land and subjects in great wealth." Minutely thus does Fabyan, a chronicler whose volume was open to William Shakspere's boyhood, describe how the King, "fallen into impotent age," believed in the professions of his two elder daughters, and divided with them his kingdom, leaving his younger daughter, who really loved him, to be married without dower to the King of France; and then how his unkind daughters and their husbands "bereft him the governance of the land," and he fled to Gallia, "for to be comforted of his daughter Cordeilla, whereof she having knowledge, of natural kindness comforted him." This in some sort was a story of William Shakspere's locality; for, according to the Chronicle. Leir "made the town of Caerleir, now called Leicester or Leicester;" and after he was "restored again to his lordship he died, and was buried at his town of Caerleir." The local association may have helped to fix the story in that mind, which in its maturity was to perceive its wondrous poetical capabilities. The early legends of the chroniclers are not to be despised, even in an age which in many historical things justly requires evidence; for they were compiled in good faith from the histories which had been compiled before them by the monkish writers, who handed down from generation to generation a narrative which hung together with singular consistency. They were compiled, too, by the later chroniclers, with a zealous patriotism. Fabyan, in his Prologue, exclaims, with a poetical spirit which is more commendable even than the poetical form which he adopts,—

> "Not for any pomp, nor yet for great meed,
> This work have I taken on hand to compile,
> But only because that I would spread
> The famous honour of this fertile isle,
> That hath continued, by many a long while,
> In excellent honour, with many a royal guide,
> Of whom the deeds have sprong to the world wide."

* "Antra in vivo saxo, nemusculum ibidem opacum, fontes liquidæ et gemmei; prata florida, antra muscosa, rivi levis et per saxa discursus; necnon solitudo et quies Musis amicissima."—Leland's MS. 'Itinerary,' as quoted by Dugdale.

Lines such as these, homely though they are, were as seeds sown upon a goodly soil, when they were read by William Shakspere. His patriotism was almost instinct.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Stratford there are two remarkable monuments of ancient civilization,—the great roads of the Ichnield-way and the Foss-way. Upon these roads, which two centuries and a half ago would present a singular contrast in the strength of their construction to the miry lanes of a later period, would the young Shakspere often walk; and he would naturally regard these ways with reverence as well as curiosity, for his chroniclers would tell him that they were the work of the Britons before the invasion of the Romans. Fabyan would tell him, in express words, that they were the work of the Britons; and Camden and Dugdale were not as yet to tell him otherwise. Robert of Gloucester says—

> "Faire weyes many on ther ben in Englonde;
> But four most of all ther ben I understonde,
> That thurgh an old kynge were made ere this,
> As men schal in this boke aftir here tell I wis.
> Fram the South into the North takith Erminge-strete.
> Fram the East into the West goeth Ikeneld-strete.
> Fram South-est to North-west, that is sum del grete
> Fram Dover into Chestre goth Watlyng-strete.
> The ferth of thise is most of alle that tilleth fram Tateneys.
> Fram the South-west to North-est into Englondes ende
> Fosse men callith thilke wey that by mony town doth wende.
> Thise foure weyes on this londe kyng Belin the wise
> Made and ordeined hem with gret fraunchise."

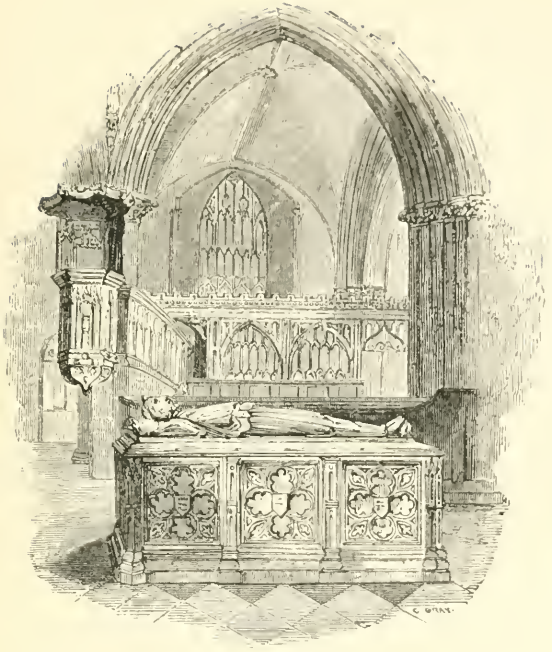
His notion, therefore, of the people of the days of Lud and Cymbeline would be that they were a powerful and a refined people; excelling in many of the arts of life; formidable in courage and military discipline; enjoying free institutions. When the matured dramatist had to touch upon this period, he would paint the Britons boldly refusing the Roman yoke, but yet partakers of the Roman civilization. The English king who defies Augustus says—

> "Thy Cæsar knighted me; my youth I spent
> Much under him; of him I gather'd honour;
> Which he to seek of me again, perforce,
> Behoves me keep at utterance."*

This is an intelligent courage, and not the courage of a king of painted savages. In the depths of the remarkable intrenchments which surround the hill of Welcombe, hearing only the noise of the sheep-bell in the uplands, or the evening chime from the distant church-tower, would William Shakspere think much of the mysterious past. No one could tell him who made these intrenchments, or for what purpose they were made. Certainly they were produced by the hand of man; but were they for defence or for religious ceremonial? Was the lofty mound, itself probably artificial, which looked down upon them, a fort

* Cymbeline, Act III., Scene 1

or a temple? Man, who would know everything and explain everything, assuredly knows little, when he cannot demand of the past an answer to such inquiries. But does he know much more of things which are nearer to his own days? Is the annalist to be trusted when he undertakes not only to describe the actions and to repeat the words, but to explain the thoughts and the motives which prompted the deeds that to a certain extent fixed the destiny of an age? There was a truth, however, which was to be found amidst all the mistakes and contradictions of the annalists—the great poetical truth, that the devices of men are insufficient to establish any permanent command over events; that crime would be followed by retribution; that evil passions would become their own tormentors; that injustice could not be successful to the end; that, although dimly seen and unwillingly acknowledged, the great presiding power of the world could make evil work for good, and advance the general happiness out of the particular misery. This was the mode, we believe, in which that thoughtful youth read the Chronicles of his country, whether brief or elaborate. Looking at them by the strong light of local association, there would be local tradition at hand to enforce that universal belief in the justice of God's providence which is in itself alone one of the many proofs of that justice. It is this religious aspect of human affairs which that young man cultivated when he cherished the poetical aspect. His books have taught him to study history through the medium of poetry. 'The Mirror for Magistrates' is a truer book for him than Fabyan's 'Chronicle.' He can understand the beauty and the power of his beloved Froissart, who described with incomparable clearness the events which he saw with his own eyes. To do this, as Froissart has done it, requires a gift of imagination as well as of faithfulness; of that imagination which, grouping and concentrating things apparently discordant, produces the highest faithfulness, because it sees and exhibits *all* the facts. But the prosaic digest of what others had seen and written about, disproportionate in its estimate of the importance of events, dwelling little upon the influences of individual character, picturing everything in the same monotonous light, and of the same height and breadth; this, which was called history, was to him a tedious fable. He stands by the side of the tomb of King John at Worcester. There, with little monumental pomp, lies the faithless King, poisoned, as he has read, by a monk. The poetical aspect of that man's history lies within a narrow compass. He was intriguing, treacherous, bloody, an oppressor of his people, a persecutor of the unprotected. His life is one of contest and misery; he loses his foreign possessions; his own land is invaded. But he stands up against foreign domination, and that a priestly domination. According to the tradition, he falls by private murder, as a consequence, not of his crimes, but of his resistance to external oppression. The prosaic view of this man's history separates the two things, his crimes and their retribution. The poetical view connects them. Arthur is avenged when the poisoned king, hated and unlamented, finds a resting-place from his own passions and their consequences in the earth beneath the paving-stones of the cathedral of Worcester. But there was a tear even for that man's grave, when his last sufferings were shadowed out in the young poet's mind:—



[Tomb of King John, Worcester.]

"Poison'd,—ill fare;—dead, forsook, cast off;
And none of you will bid the winter come,
To thrust his icy fingers in my maw;
Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course
Through my burn'd bosom; nor entreat the north
To make his bleak winds kiss my parched lips,
And comfort me with cold." *

When the dramatic power was working, as we have no doubt it was working early, in the mind of William Shakspere, he would look at history to see how events might be brought together, not in the exact order of time, but in the more natural order of cause and effect. Events would be made prominent, not according to their absolute political importance, but as they were the result of high passions and fearful contests of opinion. The epic of history is a different thing from the dramatic. In the epic the consequences of an event, perhaps the remote consequences, may be more important than the event itself; may be foreseen before the event comes; may be fully delineated after the event has happened. In the drama the importance of an action must be understood in the action itself; the hero must be great in the instant time, and not in the possible future. It is easy to understand, therefore, how the matured Shakspere attempted not to work upon many of the local associations which must have been vividly present to his youthful fancy. The great events connected with certain localities were not capable of sustaining a dramatic development. There

* King John, Act v., Scene vii.

was no event, for example, more important in its consequences than the Battle of Evesham. The battle-field must have been perfectly familiar to the young Shakspere. About two miles and a half from Evesham is an elevated point, near the village of Twyford, where the Alcester road is crossed by another track. The Avon is not more than a mile distant on either hand, for, flowing from Offenham to Evesham, a distance of about three miles, it encircles that town, returning in a nearly parallel direction, about the same distance, to Charlbury. The great road, therefore, from Alcester to Evesham continues, after it passes Twyford, through a narrow tongue of land bounded by the Avon, having considerable variety of elevation. Immediately below Twyford is a hollow now called Battlewell, crossing which the road ascends to the elevated platform of Greenhill. Here, then, was the scene of that celebrated battle which put an end to the terrible conflicts between the Crown and the Nobility, and for a season left the land in peace under the sway of an energetic despotism. The circumstances which preceded that battle, as told in 'The Chronicle of Evesham' (which in William Shakspere's time would have been read and remembered by many an old tenant of the Abbey), were singularly interesting. Simon Montfort, the great Earl of Leicester, was waiting at Evesham the arrival of his son's army from Kenilworth; but Prince Edward had surprised that army, and taken many of its leaders prisoners, and young Montfort durst not leave his stronghold. In that age rumour did not fly quite so quickly as in our days. The Earl of Leicester was ignorant of the events that had happened at Kenilworth. He had made forced marches from Hereford to Worcester, and thence to Evesham. There were solemn masses in the Abbey Church on the 3rd of August, 1265, and the mighty Earl, who had won for himself the name of 'Sir Simon the Righteous,' felt assured that his son was at hand, and that Heaven would uphold his cause against a perjured Prince. On the morning of the 4th of August the Earl of Leicester sent his barber Nicholas to the top of the Abbey tower, to look for the succour that was coming over the hills from Kenilworth. The barber came down with eager gladness, for he saw, a few miles off, the banner of young Simon de Montfort in advance of a mighty host. And again the Earl sent the barber to the top of the Abbey tower, and the man hastily descended in fear and sorrow, for the banner of young de Montfort was no more to be seen, but, coming nearer and nearer, were seen the standards of Prince Edward, and of Mortimer, and of Gloucester. Then saw the Earl his imminent peril; and he said, according to one writer, "God have our souls all, our days are all done;" or, according to another writer, "Our souls God have, for our bodies be theirs." But Montfort was not a man to fly. Over the bridge of Evesham he might have led his forces, so as to escape from the perilous position in which he was shut up. He hastily marched northward, with King Henry his prisoner, at two o'clock in the afternoon of that day. Before nightfall the waters of the little valley were blood-red. Thousands were slain between those two hills; thousands fled, but there was no escape but by the bridge of Evesham, and they perished in the Avon. The old King, turned loose upon a war-horse amidst the terrible conflict, was saved from death at the hands of the victors by crying out, "I am Henry of Winchester." The massacre of Evesham, where a hun-

[Bridge at Evesham.]

dred and eighty barons and knights, in arms for what they call their liberties, were butchered without quarter, was a final measure of royal vengeance. It was a great epic story. It had dramatic points, but it was not essentially dramatic. If Shakspere had chosen the wars of the Barons, instead of the wars of the Roses, for a vast dramatic theme, the fate of Simon de Montfort and his gallant company might have been told so as never to have been forgotten. But he had another tale of civil war to tell; one more essentially dramatic in the concentration of its events, the rapid changes in its fortunes, the marked characters of its leaders. On the battle-field of Evesham he would indeed meditate upon "The ill success of treason, the fall of hasty climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the misery of civil dissension, and how just God is evermore in punishing murder."* But these lessons were to be worked out more emphatically in other histories. Another Warwickshire poet would sing the great Battle of Edward and Leicester:—

"In that black night before this sad and dismal day,
Were apparitions strange, as dread Heaven would bewray
The horrors to ensue: O most amazing sight!
Two armies in the air discerned were to fight,
Which came so near to earth, that in the morn they found
The prints of horses' feet remaining on the ground;
Which came but as a show, the time to entertain
Till th' angry armies join'd, to act the bloody scene.
Shrill shouts, and deadly cries, each way the air do fill,
And not a word was heard from either side, but kill;
The father 'gainst the son, the brother 'gainst the brother,
With gleaves, swords, bills, and pikes, were murthering one another.

* Nashe

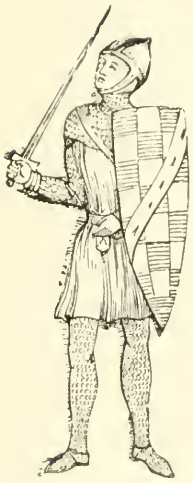
The full luxurious earth seems surfeited with blood,
Whilst in his uncle's gore th' unnatural nephew stood;
Whilst with their charged staves the desperate horsemen meet,
They hear their kinsmen groan under their horses' feet.
Dead men, and weapons broke, do on the earth abound;
The drums, bedash'd with brains, do give a dismal sound.
Great Le'ster there expir'd, with Henry his brave son,
When many a high exploit they in that day had done.
Scarce was there noble house of which those times could tell,
But that some one thereof on this or that side fell;
Amongst the slaughter'd men that there lay heap'd on piles,
Bohuns and Beauchamps were, Bassets and Mandeviles:
Segraves and Saint Johns seek, upon the end of all,
To give those of their names their Christian burial.
Ten thousand on both sides were ta'en and slain that day;
Prince Edward gets the goal, and bears the palm away." *

There is peace awhile in the land. A strong man is on the throne. The first Edward dies, and, a weak and profligate son succeeding him, there is again misrule and turbulence. Within ten miles of Stratford there was a fearful tragedy enacted in the year 1312. On the little knoll called Blacklow Hill, about a mile from Warwick, would William Shakspere ponder upon the fate of Gaveston. In that secluded spot all around him would be peacefulness; the only sound of life about him would be the dashing of the wheel of the old mill at Guy's Cliff. The towers of Warwick would be seen rising above their

[Mill at Guy's Cliff.]

surrounding trees; and, higher than all, Guy's Tower. He would have heard that this tower was not so called from the Saxon champion, the Guy of minstrelsy, whose statue, bearing shield and sword, he had often looked upon in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen at Guy's Cliff. The Tower was called after

* Drayton's 'Polyolbion,' 22nd Song.



[Ancient Statue of Guy at Guy's Cliff.]

the Guy whose common name—a name of opprobrium fixed on him by Gaveston—was associated with that of his maternal ancestors,—Guy, the Black Dog of Arden. And then the tragedy of Blacklow Hill, as he recollected this, would present itself to his imagination. There is a prisoner standing in the great hall of Warwick Castle. He is unarmed; he is clad in holiday vestments, but they are soiled and torn; his face is pale with fear and the fatigue of a night journey. By force has he been hurried some thirty miles across the country from Dedington, near Banbury; and amidst the shouts of soldiery and the rude clang of drum and trumpet has he entered the castle of his enemies, where they are sitting upon the dais,—Warwick and Lancaster, and Hereford and Arundel,—and the prisoner stands trembling before them, a monarch's minion, but one whom they have no right to punish. But the sentence is pronounced that he shall die. He sued for mercy to those whom he had called "the black dog" and "the old hog," but they spurned him. A sad procession is marshalled. The castle gates are opened; the drawbridge is let down. In silence the avengers march to Blacklow Hill, with their prisoner in the midst. He dies by the axe. In a few years his unhappy master falls still more miserably. Here is, indeed, a story fit for tragedy; and that the young Shakspere had essayed to dramatize it, or at any rate had formed a dramatic picture of so remarkable an event, one so fitted for the display of character and passion, may be easily conjectured. But it was a story, also, which in some particulars his judgment would have rejected, as unworthy to be dramatized. Another poet would arise, a man of undoubted power, of daring genius, of fiery temperament, who would seize upon the story of Edward II. and his wretched favourite, and produce a drama that should present a striking contrast to the drawling histories of the earlier stage. The

subject upon which the "dead Shepherd" had put forth his strength was not to be touched by his greater rival.*

A reign of power succeeds to one of weakness. Edward III. is upon the throne. William Shakspere is familiar with the great events of this reign; for the 'Chronicles' of Froissart, translated by Lord Berners, have more than the charm of the romance-writers; they present realities in colours more brilliant than those of fiction. The clerk of the chamber to Queen Philippa is overflowing with that genial spirit which was to be a great characteristic of Shakspere himself. Froissart looks upon nothing with indifference. He enters most heartily into the spirit of every scene into which he is thrown. The luxuries of courts unfit him not for a relish of the charms of nature. The fatigues of camps only prepare him for the enjoyment of banquets and dances. He throws himself into the boisterous sports of the field at one moment, and is proud to produce a virelay of his own composition at another. The early violets and white and red roses are sweet to his sense; and so is a night draught of claret or Rochelle wine. He can meditate and write as he travels alone upon his palfrey, with his portmanteau, having no follower but his faithful greyhound; he can observe and store up in his memory when he is in the court of David II. of Scotland, or of Gaston de Foix, or in the retinue of the Black Prince. The hero of Froissart is Edward Prince of Wales, the glorious son of a glorious father. William Shakspere was in the presence of local associations connected with this prince. He was especially Prince of Coventry; it was his own city; and he gave licence to build its walls and gates, and cherished its citizens, and dwelt among them. As the young poet walked in the courts of the old hall of St. Mary's, itself a part of an extensive palace, he would believe that the prince had sojourned there after he had won his spurs at Cressy; and he would picture the boy-hero, as Froissart had described him, left by his confiding father in the midst of danger to struggle alone, and alone to triumph:—"The prince's battalion at one period was very hard pressed; and they with the prince sent a messenger to the king, who was on a little windmill hill; then the knight said to the king, 'Sir, the Earl of Warwick, and the Earl of Oxford, Sir Regnold Cobham, and others, such as be about the prince your son, are fiercely fought withal, and are sore handled; wherefore they desire you that you and your battle will come and aid them; for if the Frenchmen increase, as they doubt they will, your son and they shall have much ado.' Then the king said, 'Is my son dead or hurt, or on the earth felled?' 'No, Sir,' quoth the knight, 'but he his hardly matched, wherefore he hath need of your aid.' 'Well,' said the king, 'return to him and to them that sent you hither, and say to them that they send no more to me for any adventure that falleth, as long as my son is alive; and also say to them that they suffer him this day to win his spurs, for,

* The notice by Shakspere of Marlowe, in As You Like It, is one of the few examples we have of any mention by the great poet of his contemporaries. This is a kind notice conveyed in the introduction of a line from Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander:'—

> "Dead Shepherd! now I find thy saw of might,
> Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?"

[St. Mary's Hall, Court Front.]

if God be pleased, I will this journey be his, and the honour thereof, and to them that be about him.' Then the knight returned again to them, and showed the king's words, the which greatly encouraged them, and they repined in that they had sent to the king as they did." And then, it may be, the whole epopee of that great war for the conquest of France might be shaped out in the young man's imagination, and amidst its chivalrous daring, its fields of slaughter, its perils overcome by almost superhuman strength, kings and princes for prisoners, and the conqueror lowly and humble in his triumph, would there be touching domestic scenes,—Sir Eustace de Pierre, the rich burgher of Calais, putting his life in jeopardy for the safety of the good town, and the vengeance of the stern conqueror averted by his gentle queen, all arranging themselves into something like a great drama. But even here the dramatic interest was not sustained. There was a succession of stirring events, but no one great action to which all other actions tended and were subservient. Cressy is fought, Calais is taken, Poictiers is to come, after the hero has marched through the country, burning

and wasting, regardless of the people, thinking only of his father's disputed rights; and then a mercenary war in Spain in a bad cause, and the hero dies in his bed, and the war for conquest is to generate other wars. These are events that belong to the chronicler, and not to the dramatist. Romance has come in to lend them a human interest. The future conqueror of France is to be a weak lover at the feet of a Countess of Salisbury; to be rejected; to cast off his weakness. The drama may mix the romance and the chronicle together; it has done so: but we believe not that he who had a struggle with his judgment to unite the epic and the dramatic in the history of Henry V. ever attempted to dramatize the story of Edward III.*

Warwick—it is full of historical associations, but its early history is not dramatic according to the notions that William Shakspere will subsequently work out. Let the ballad-makers and the heroic poets that are to follow sing the legend of Guy the Saxon, and his combat with Colbrand the Dane. The stern power of the later Guy is for another to dramatize. Thomas Earl of Warwick, who led the van at Cressy, shall have his fame with the Cobhams and the Char-

* See our Notice of the play entitled 'The Reign of Edward III.' in the Analysis of plays ascribed to Shakspere.

[Warwick Castle, from the Island.]

doses, and posterity shall look upon his tomb in the midst of the choir of the collegiate church at Warwick. The Earl who was cast aside by Richard II. (he also was named Thomas) shall be merged in the eventful history of that time; but it shall be recollected that he built "that strong and stately tower standing at the north-east corner of the Castle here at Warwick."* His strong and stately tower could not stead him in his necessity, for he was made prisoner by the King at a feast to which he was treacherously invited, banished, subsequently imprisoned in the Tower, and his possessions seized upon. The fall of Richard restored him to his honours and possessions; and he was enabled to appoint by his will "that the sword and coat of mail sometime belonging to the famous Guy" should remain to his son and his heirs after him. This sword and coat of mail would have been a more appropriate, though perhaps not a more authentic, relic for the young Shakspere to look upon than the famous porridge-pot of our own day. In the reign of Henry IV. there came Earl Richard, who took the banner of Owen Glendower, and fought against the Percies at Shrewsbury; who voyaged to the Holy Land, and hung up his offerings at the holy sepulchre at Jerusalem, and was royally feasted by the Soldan's lieutenant, "hearing that he was descended from the famous Sir Guy of Warwick, whose story they had in books of their own language."† And it was he who was sent to France to treat for the marriage of Henry V. with the Lady Katherine; and it was he who, after the death of the Conqueror of Agincourt, had tutelage of the young Henry his son; and was lieutenant-general and governor of the realm of France. The remainder of his history might be read by William Shakspere, inscribed upon that splendid monument which he erected in the chapel called after his name, and ordered by his will to be built adjoining the collegiate church. Visited by long sickness, he died in the Castle at Rouen. His monument is still a glorious specimen of the arts of the middle ages, and so is the chapel under whose roof it is erected. Another lord of Warwick succeeded, who, having been created Duke of Warwick, moved the envy of other great ones in that time of faction: but he died young, and without issue; and his sister, the wife of Richard Neville, succeeded to her brother's lands and castles, and by patent her husband became Earl of Warwick. This was indeed a mighty man, the stout Earl of Warwick, the king-maker, he who first fought at St. Albans in the great cause of York, and after many changes of opinion and of fortune fell at Barnet in the cause of Lancaster. The history of this, the greatest of the lords of the ragged staff, is in itself a wonderful drama, in a series of dramas that are held together by a strong poetical chain. The first scene of this great series of dramas begins when the Duke of Hereford and the Duke of Norfolk meet in the lists

"At Coventry upon St. Lambert's day."‡

The last scene is at Bosworth, when he who is held to have wanted every virtue but courage left the world exclaiming

"A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!"§

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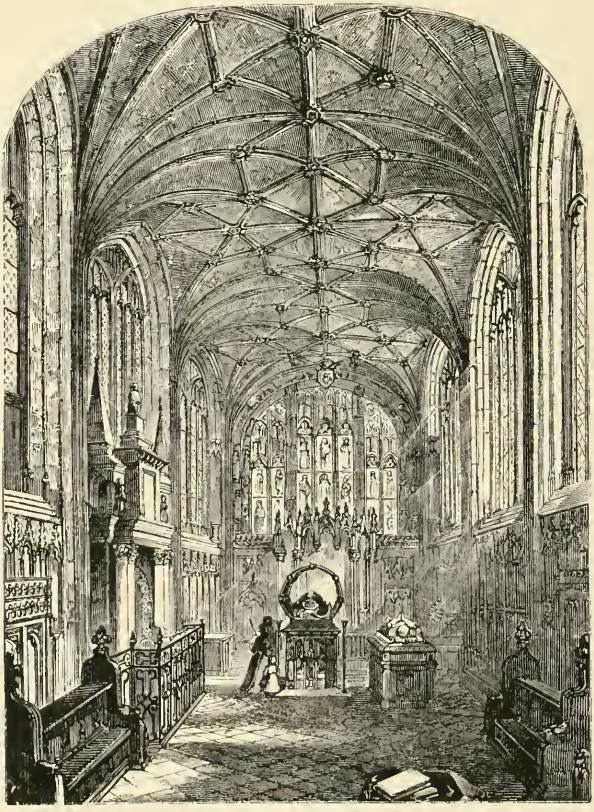
* Dugdale, quoting Walsingham.
† Dugdale.
‡ Richard II., Act I.
§ Richard III., Act V

The family traditions of William Shakspere; the Chronicle "of the two noble and illustre Families of Lancaster and York," his household book; the localities amidst which he dwelt; must have concurred early in fixing his imagination upon the dramatic capabilities of that magnificent story which has given us a series of eight poetical 'Chronicle Histories,' of which a German critic has said,—"The historian who cannot learn from them is not yet perfect in his own art."*

* Tieck. 'Dramaturgische Blätter.



[Beauchamp Chapel, Warwick.]

[St. Mary's Hall—Interior.]

CHAPTER XII.

YORK AND LANCASTER.

Hall, the chronicler, writing his history of 'The Families of Lancaster and York,' about seventy years after the "continual dissension for the crown of this noble realm" was terminated, says,—"What nobleman liveth at this day, or what gentleman of any ancient stock or progeny is clear, whose lineage hath not been infested and plagued with this unnatural division?" During the boyhood of William Shakspere, it cannot be doubted that he would meet with many a gentleman, and many a yeoman, who would tell him how their forefathers had been

thus "infested and plagued." The traditions of the most stirring events of that contest would at this time be about a century old; generally diluted in their interest by passing through the lips of three or four generations, but occasionally presented vividly to the mind of the inquiring boy in the narration of some amongst the "hoary-headed eld," whose fathers had fought at Bosworth or Tewksbury. Many of these traditions, too, would be essentially local; extending back even to the period when the banished Duke of Hereford, in his bold march

"From Ravenspurg to Cotswold,"*

gathered a host of followers in the counties of Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Warwick, and Worcester. Fields, where battles had been fought; towns, where parliaments had assembled, and treaties had been ratified; castles, where the great leaders had stood at bay, or had sallied forth upon the terrified country—such were the objects which the young poet would associate with many an elaborate description of the chroniclers, and many an interesting anecdote of his ancient neighbours. Let us endeavour rapidly to trace such portion of the history of these events as may be placed in association with the localities that were familiar to William Shakspere; for it appears to us that his dramatic power was early directed towards this long and complicated story, by some principle even more exciting than its capabilities for the purposes of the drama. It was the story, we think, which was presented to him in the evening-talk around the hearth of his childhood; it was the story whose written details were most accessible to him, being narrated by Hall with a rare minuteness of picturesque circumstance; but it was a story also of which his own district had been the scene, in many of its most stirring events. Out of ten English Historical Plays which were written by him, and some undoubtedly amongst his first performances, he has devoted eight to circumstances belonging to this memorable story. No other nation ever possessed such a history of the events of a century,—a history in which the agents are not the hard abstractions of warriors and statesmen, but men of flesh and blood like ourselves; men of passion, and crime, and virtue; elevated perhaps by the poetical art, but filled, also through that art, with such a wondrous life, that we dwell amongst them as if they were of our own day, and feel that they must have spoken as he has made them speak, and act as he has made them act. It is in vain that we are told that some events are omitted, and some transposed; that documentary history does not exhibit its evidence *here*, that a contemporary narrative somewhat militates against the representation *there*. The general truth of this dramatic history cannot be shaken. It is a philosophical history in the very highest sense of that somewhat abused term. It contains the philosophy that can only be produced by the union of the noblest imagination with the most just and temperate judgment. It is the loftiness of the poetical spirit which has enabled Shakspere alone to write this history with impartiality. Open the chroniclers, and we

* Richard II., Act II., Scene III.

find the prejudices of the Yorkist or the Lancastrian manifesting the intensity of the old factious hatred. Who can say to which faction Shakspere belongs? He has comprehended the whole, whilst others knew only a part.

After the first two or three pages of Hall's 'Chronicle,' we are plunged into the midst of a scene, gorgeous in all the pomp of chivalry; a combat for life or death, made the occasion of a display of regal magnificence such as had been seldom presented in England. The old chronicler of the two Houses puts forth all his strength in the description of such scenes. He slightly passes over the original quarrel between Hereford and Norfolk: the pride, and the passion, and the kingly craft, are left for others to delineate; but the "sumptuous theatre and lists royal" at the city of Coventry are set forth with wondrous exactness. We behold the High Constable and the High Marshal of England enter the lists with a great company of men in silk sendall, embroidered with silver, to keep the field. The Duke of Hereford appears at the barriers, on his white courser barbed with blue and green velvet, embroidered with swans and antelopes of goldsmith's work; and there he swears upon the Holy Evangelists that his quarrel is true and just; and he enters the lists, and sits down in a chair of green velvet. Then comes the King, with ten thousand men in harness; and he takes his seat upon a stage, richly hanged and pleasantly adorned. The Duke of Norfolk hovers at the entry of the lists, his horse being barbed with crimson velvet, embroidered with lions of silver and mulberry-trees; and he, having also made oath, enters the field manfully, and sits down in his chair of crimson velvet. One reader of Hall's pompous description of the lists at Coventry will invest that scene with something richer than velvet and goldsmith's work. He will make the champions speak something more than the formal words of the chivalric defiance; and yet the scene shall still be painted with the minutest ceremonial observance. We in vain look, at the present day, within the streets once enclosed by the walls of Coventry, for the lists where, if Richard had not thrown down his warder, the story of the wars of the Roses might not have been written. Probably in the days of the young Shakspere the precise scene of that event might have been pointed out. The manor of Cheylesmore, which was granted by Edward III. to the Black Prince for the better support of his honour as Duke of Cornwall, descended to his son Richard; and in the eighth year of his reign, "the walls on the south part of this city being not built, the mayor, bailiffs, and commonalty thereof humbly besought the King to give them leave that they might go forward with that work, who thereupon granted licence to them so to do, on condition that they should include within their walls his said manor-place standing within the park of Cheylesmore, as the record expresseth, which park was a woody ground in those times."* Encroached upon, no doubt, was this park in the age of Elizabeth. But Coventry would then have abundant memorials of its ancient magnificence which have now perished. He who wrote the glorious scene of the lists upon St. Lambert's day in all probability derived some inspiration from the *genius loci*.

The challenger and the challenged are each banished. John of Gaunt dies,

* Dugdale.

and the King seizes upon the possessions of his dangerous son. Then begins that vengeance which is to harass England with a century of blood. Hall and Froissart make the Duke of Lancaster, after his landing, march direct to London, and afterwards proceed to the west of England. There can be no doubt that they were wrong; that the Duke, having brought with him a very small force, marched as quickly as possible into the midland counties, where he had many castles and possessions, and in which he might raise a numerous army among his own friends and retainers. The local knowledge of the poet, founded upon traditionary information, would have enabled him to decide upon the correctness of the statement which shows Bolingbroke marching direct from Ravenspurg to Berkeley Castle. The natural and easy dialogue between Bolingbroke and Northumberland exhibits as much local accuracy in a single line as if the poet had given us a laboured description of the Cotswolds:—

> "I am a stranger here in Glostershire.
> These high wild hills, and rough uneven ways,
> Draw out our miles, and make them wearisome."*

In a few weeks England sustains a revolution. The King is deposed; the great Duke is on the throne. Two or three years of discontent and intrigue, and then insurrection. Shrewsbury can scarcely be called one of Shakspere's native localities, yet it is clear that he was familiar with the place. In Falstaff's march from London to Shrewsbury the poet glances, lovingly as it were, at the old well-known scenes. "The red-nosed innkeeper at Daventry" had assuredly filled a glass of sack for him. The distance from Coventry to Sutton-Coldfield was accurately known by him, when he makes the burly commander say—"Bardolph, get thee before to Coventry; fill me a bottle of sack: our soldiers shall march through: we 'll to Sutton Cophill to-night."† Shakspere, it seems to us, could scarcely resist the temptation of showing the Prince in Warwickshire:—"What, Hal? How now, mad wag? What a devil dost thou in Warwickshire?" A word or two tells us that the poet had seen the field of Shrewsbury:—

> "How bloodily the sun begins to peer
> Above yon busky hill!"

The Chronicle informs us that Henry had marched with a great army towards Wales to encounter Percy and Douglas, who were coming from the north to join with Glendower; and then, "The King, hearing of the Earls' approaching, thought it policy to encounter with them before that the Welshman should join with their army, and so include him on both parts, and therefore returned suddenly to the town of Shrewsbury. He was scantly entered into the town,

* Richard II., Act II., Scene III.

† All the old copies of The First Part of Henry IV. have Cop-hill. There is no doubt that Sutton *Coldfield*, as it is now spelt, was meant by Cop-hill; but the old printers, we believe, improperly introduced the hyphen; for Dugdale, in his map, spells the word *Cofeild;* and it is easy to see how the common pronunciation would be *Cophill*, or *Cofill*.

[Shrewsbury.]

but he was by his posts advertised that the Earls, with banners displayed and battles ranged, were coming toward him, and were so hot and so courageous that they with light horses began to skirmish with his host. The King, perceiving their doings, issued out, and encamped himself without the east gate of the town. The Earls, nothing abashed although their succours them deceived, embattled themselves not far from the King's army." There was a night of watchfulness; and then, "the next day in the morning early, which was the vigil of Mary Magdalen, the King, perceiving that the battle was nearer than he either thought or looked for, lest that long tarrying might be a minishing of his strength, set his battles in good order." The scene of this great contest is well defined; the King has encamped himself without the east gate of Shrewsbury. The poet, by one of his magical touches, shows us the sun rising upon the hostile armies; but he is more minute than the chronicler. The King is looking eastward, and he sees the sun rising over a wooded hill. This is not only poetical, but it is true. He who stands upon the plain on the east side of Shrewsbury, the Battle Field as it is now called, waiting, not "a long hour by Shrewsbury clock," but waiting till the minute

> "when the morning sun shall raise his car
> Above the border of this horizon,"

will see that sun rise over a "busky hill," Haughmond Hill. We may well

* Henry VI., Part III., Act IV., Scene VII.

believe therefore, from this accuracy, that Shrewsbury had lent a local interest in the mind of Shakspere to the dramatic conception of the death-scene of the gallant Percy. Insurrection was not crushed at Shrewsbury; but the course of its action does not lie in the native district of the poet. Yet his Falstaff has an especial affection for these familiar scenes, and perhaps through him the poet described some of the "old familiar faces." Shallow and Silence assuredly they were his good neighbours. We think there was a tear in his eye when he wrote, "And is old Double dead?" Mouldy, and Shadow, and Wart, and Feeble—were they not the representatives of the valiant men of Stratford, upon whom the Corporation annually expended large sums for harness? After the treacherous putting down of rebellion at Gualtree Forest, Falstaff casts a longing look towards the fair seat of "Master Robert Shallow, Esquire." "My lord, I beseech you give me leave to go through Gloucestershire." We are not now far out of the range of Shakspere's youthful journeys around Stratford. Shallow will make the poor carter answer it in his wages "about the sack he lost the other day at Hinckley Fair." "William Visor of Wincot," that arrant knave who, according to honest and charitable Davy "should have some countenance at his friend's request," was he a neighbour of Christopher Sly's "fat ale-wife of Wincot;" and did they dwell together in the Wincot of the parish of Aston-Clifford, or the Wilmecote of the parish of Aston-Cantlow? The chroniclers are silent upon this point; and they tell us nothing of the history of "Clement Perkes of the Hill." The chroniclers deal with less happy and less useful sojourners on the earth. Even "goodman Puff of Barson," one of "the greatest men in the realm," has no fame beyond the immortality which Master Silence has bestowed upon him.

The four great historical dramas which exhibit the fall of Richard II., the triumph of Bolingbroke, the inquietudes of Henry IV., the wild career of his son ending in a reign of chivalrous daring and victory, were undoubtedly written after the four other plays of which the great theme was the war of the Roses. The local associations which might have influenced the young poet in the choice of the latter subject would be concentrated, in a great degree, upon Warwick Castle. The hero of these wars was unquestionably Richard Neville. It was a Beauchamp who fought at Agincourt in that goodly company who were to be remembered "to the ending of the world,"—

> "Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
> Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester."

He ordained in his will that in his chapel at Warwick "three masses every day should be sung as long as the world might endure." The masses have long since ceased; but his tomb still stands, and he has a memorial that will last longer than his tomb. The chronicler passes over his fame at Agincourt, but the dramatist records it. Did the poet's familiarity with those noble towers in which the Beauchamp had lived suggest this honour to his memory? But here, at any rate, was the stronghold of the Neville. Here, when the land was at peace in the dead sleep of weak government, which was to be succeeded by

[Entrance to Warwick Castle.]

fearful action, the great Earl dwelt with more than a monarch's pomp, having his own officer-at-arms called Warwick herald, with hundreds of friends and dependants bearing about his badge of the ragged staff; for whose boundless hospitality there was daily provision made as for the wants of an army; whose manors and castles and houses were to be numbered in almost every county; and who not only had pre-eminence over every Earl in the land, but, as Great Captain of the Sea, received to his own use the King's tonnage and poundage. When William Shakspere looked upon this castle in his youth, a peaceful Earl dwelt within it, the brother of the proud Leicester—the son of the ambitious Northumberland who had suffered death in the attempt to make Lady Jane Grey queen, but whose heir had been restored in blood by Mary. Warwick Castle, in the reign of Elizabeth, was peaceful as the river which glided by it, the most beautiful of fortress palaces. No prisoners lingered in its donjon keep; the beacon blazed not upon its battlements, the warder looked not anxiously out to see if all was quiet on the road from Kenilworth; the draw-bridge was let down for the curious stranger, and he might refresh himself in the buttery without suspicion. Here, then, might the young poet gather from the old servants of the house some of the traditions of a century previous, when the followers of the great Earl were ever in fortress or in camp, and for a while there seemed to be no king in England, but the name of Warwick was greater than that of king. Here, in the quiet woods and launds of this castle, or stretched

on the bank of his own Avon beneath its high walls, might he have imagined, without the authority of any chronicler, that scene in the Temple Gardens which was to connect the story of the wars in France with the coming events in England. In this scene the Earl of Warwick first plucks the "white rose with Plantagenet;" and it is Warwick who prophesies what is to come:—

> "This brawl to-day
> Grown to this faction, in the Temple garden,
> Shall send, between the red rose and the white,
> A thousand souls to death and deadly night."*

In the connected plays which form the Three Parts of Henry VI., the Earl of Warwick, with some violation of chronological accuracy, is constantly brought forward in a prominent situation. When the "brave peers of England" unite in denouncing the marriage of Henry with Margaret of Anjou, the Earl of Salisbury says to his bold heir:—

> "Warwick, my son, the comfort of my age,
> Thy deeds, thy plainness, and thy housekeeping,
> Hath won the greatest favour of the Commons."†

In a subsequent scene, Beaufort calls him "ambitious Warwick." A scene or two onward, and Warwick, after privately acknowledging the title of Richard Duke of York, exclaims—

> "My heart assures me that the earl of Warwick
> Shall one day make the duke of York a king."

* Henry VI., Part I., Act II., Scene IV. † Henry VI., Part II., Act II., Scene I.

[Warwick, from Lodge Hill.]

It is he, the "blunt-witted lord," that defies Suffolk, and sets the men of Bury upon him to demand his banishment. It is he who stands by the bed of the dying Beaufort, judging that

"So bad a death argues a monstrous life."

All this is skilfully managed by the dramatist, to keep Warwick constantly before the eyes of his audience, before he is embarked in the great contest for the crown. The poet has given Warwick an early importance, which the chroniclers of the age do not assign to him. He is dramatically correct in so doing; but, at the same time, his judgment might in some degree have been governed by the strength of local associations. Once embarked in the great quarrel, Warwick is the presiding genius of the scene :—

"Now, by my father's badge, old Nevil's crest,
The rampant bear chain'd to the ragged staff,
This day I 'll wear aloft my burgonet,
As on a mountain-top the cedar shows
That keeps his leaves in spite of any storm." *

The sword is first unsheathed in that battle-field of St. Albans. After three or four years of forced quiet it is again drawn. The "she-wolf of France" plunges her fangs into the blood of York at Wakefield, after Warwick has won the great battle of Northampton. The crown is achieved by the son of York at the field of Towton, where

"Warwick rages like a chafed bull."

The poet necessarily hurries over events which occupy a large space in the narratives of the historian. The rash marriage of Edward provokes the resentment of Warwick, and his power is now devoted to set up the fallen house of Lancaster. Shakspere is then again in his native localities. After the battle of Banbury, according to the chronicler, "the northern men resorted toward Warwick, where the Earl had gathered a great multitude of people. . . . . The King likewise, sore thirsting to recover his loss late sustained, and desirous to be revenged of the death and murders of his lords and friends, marched toward Warwick with a great army. . . . All the King's doings were by espials declared to the Earl of Warwick, which, like a wise and politic captain, intending not to lose so great an advantage to him given, but trusting to bring all his purposes to a final end and determination, by only obtaining this enterprise, in the dead of the night, with an elect company of men of war, as secretly as was possible set on the King's field, killing them that kept the watch, and ere the King was ware (for he thought of nothing less than of that chance that happened), at a place called Wolney (Wolvey), four mile from Warwick, he was taken prisoner, and brought to the Castle of Warwick."† The statement that Wolvey is four miles from Warwick is one of many examples of the inaccuracy of the old annalists in matters of distance. It is upon the borders of Leicester-

* Henry VI., Part II., Act v., Scene iii. † Hall.

shire, Coventry lying equidistant between Wolvey and Warwick. Shakspere has dramatized the scene of Edward's capture. Edward escapes from Middleham Castle, and, after a short banishment, lands again with a few followers in England, to place himself again upon the throne, by a movement which has only one parallel in history.* Shakspere describes his countrymen, in the speech which the great Earl delivers for the encouragement of Henry :—

> " In Warwickshire I have true-hearted friends,
> Not mutinous in peace, yet bold in war;
> Those will I muster up."

Henry is again seized by the Yorkists. Warwick, " the great-grown traitor," is at the head of his native forces. The local knowledge of the poet is now rapidly put forth in the scene upon the walls of Coventry :—

> " *War.* Where is the post that comes from valiant Oxford?
> How far hence is thy lord, mine honest fellow?
> 1 *Mess.* By this at *Dunsmore*, marching thitherward.
> *War.* How far off is our brother Montague?
> Where is the post that came from Montague?
> 2 *Mess.* By this at *Daintry*, with a puissant troop.
>
> *Enter Sir* JOHN SOMERVILLE.
>
> *War.* Say, Somerville, what says my loving son?
> And, by thy guess, how nigh is Clarence now?
> *Som.* At *Southam* I did leave him with his forces,
> And do expect him here some two hours hence
> [*Drum heard.*
> *War.* Then Clarence is at hand, I hear his drum.
> *Som.* It is not his, my lord; here *Southam* lies;
> The drum your honour hears marcheth from *Warwick*." †

The chronicler tells the great event of the encounter of the two leaders at Coventry, which the poet has so spiritedly dramatized :—" In the mean season King Edward came to Warwick, where he found all the people departed, and from thence with all diligence advanced his power toward Coventry, and in a plain by the city he pitched his field. And the next day after that he came thither his men were set forward and marshalled in array, and he valiantly bade the Earl battle: which, mistrusting that he should be deceived by the Duke of Clarence, as he was indeed, kept himself close within the walls. And yet he had perfect word that the Duke of Clarence came forward toward him with a great army. King Edward, being also thereof informed, raised his camp, and made toward the Duke. And lest that there might be thought some fraud to be cloaked between them, the King set his battles in an order, as though he would fight without any longer delay; the Duke did likewise." ‡ Then " a

* The landing of Bonaparte from Elba, and Edward at Ravenspurg, are remarkably similar in their rapidity and their boldness, though very different in their final consequences.

† Henry VI., Part III., Act v., Scene i.

‡ Hall.

[St. Mary's Hall—Street Front.]

fraternal amity was concluded and proclaimed," which was the ruin of Warwick, and of the House of Lancaster. Ten years before these events, in the Parliament held in this same city of Coventry—a city which had received great benefits from Henry VI.—York, and Salisbury, and Warwick had been attainted. And now Warwick held the city for him who had in that same city denounced him as a traitor. With store of ordnance, and warlike equipments, had the great Captain lain in this city for a few weeks; and he was honoured as one greater than either of the rival Kings—one who could bestow a crown and who could take a crown away; and he sate in state in the old halls of Coventry, and prayers went up for his cause in its many churches, and the proud city's municipal officers were as his servants. He marched out of the city with his forces, after Palm Sunday; and on Easter-day the quarrel between him and the perjured Clarence and the luxurious Edward was settled for ever upon Barnet Field:—

> "Thus yields the cedar to the axe's edge,
> Whose arms gave shelter to the princely eagle;
> Under whose shade the ramping lion slept;

Whose top-branch overpeer'd Jove's spreading tree,
And kept low shrubs from winter's powerful wind." *

The Battle of Barnet was fought on the 14th of April, 1471. Sir John Paston, a stout Lancastrian, writes to his mother from London on the 18th of April:—"As for other tidings, it is understood here that the Queen Margaret is verily landed, and her son, in the west country, and I trow that as to-morrow, or else the next day, the King Edward will depart from hence to her ward to drive her out again." † Sir John Paston, himself in danger of his head, seems to hint that the landing of Queen Margaret will again change the aspect of things. In sixteen days the Battle of Tewksbury was fought. This is the great crowning event of the terrible struggle of sixteen years; and the scenes at Tewksbury are amongst the most spirited of these dramatic pictures. We may readily believe that Shakspere had looked upon the "fair park adjoining to the town," where the Duke of Somerset "pitched his field, against the will and consent of many other captains which would that he should have drawn aside;" and that he had also thought of the unhappy end of the gallant Prince Edward, as he stood in "the church of the Monastery of Black Monks in Tewksbury," where "his body was homely interred with the other simple corses." ‡

* Henry VI., Part III., Act v., Scene II.

† 'Paston Letters,' edited by A. Ramsay, vol. ii., p. 60. ‡ Hall.

[Tewksbury.]

There were twelve years of peace between the Battle of Tewksbury and the death of Edward IV. Then came the history which Hall entitles, 'The Pitiful Life of King Edward the Fifth,' and 'The Tragical Doings of King Richard the Third.' The last play of the series which belongs to the wars of the Roses is unquestionably written altogether with a more matured power than those which preceded it; yet the links which connect it with the other three plays of the series are so unbroken, the treatment of character is so consistent, and the poetical conception of the whole so uniform, that, whatever amount of criticism may be yet in store to show that our view is incorrect, we now confidently speak of them all as the plays of Shakspere, and of Shakspere alone.* Matured, especially in its wonderful exhibition of character, as the Richard III. is, we cannot doubt that the subject was very early familiar to the young poet's mind. The Battle of Bosworth Field was the great event of his own locality, which for a century had fixed the government of England. The course of the Reformation, and especially the dissolution of the Monasteries, had produced great social changes, which were in operation at the time in which William Shakspere was born; whose effects, for good and for evil, he must have seen working around him, as he grew from year to year in knowledge and experience. But those events were too recent, and indeed of too delicate a nature, to assume the poetical aspect in his mind. They abided still in the region of prejudice and controversy. It was dangerous to speak of the great religious divisions of the kingdom with a tolerant impartiality. History could scarcely deal with these opinions in a spirit of justice. Poetry, thus, which has regard to what is permanent and universal, has passed by these matters, important as they are. But the great event which placed the Tudor family on the throne, and gave England a stable government, however occasionally distracted by civil and religious division, was an event which would seize fast upon such a mind as that of William Shakspere. His ancestor, there can be little doubt, had been an adherent of the Earl of Richmond. For his faithful services to the conqueror at Bosworth he was rewarded, as we are assured, by lands in Warwickshire. That field of Bosworth would therefore have to him a family as well as a local interest. Burton, the historian of Leicestershire, who was born about ten years after William Shakspere, tells us "that his great-great-grandfather, John Hardwick, of Lindley, near Bosworth, a man of very short stature, but active and courageous, tendered his service to Henry, with some troops of horse, the night he lay at Atherston, became his guide to the field, advised him in the attack, and how to profit by the sun and by the wind."† Burton further says, writing in 1622, that the inhabitants living around the plain called Bosworth Field, more properly the plain of Sutton, "have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory, by reason that some persons thereabout, which saw the battle fought, were living within less than forty years, of which persons myself have seen some, and have

* See our 'Essay on the Three Parts of King Henry VI., and King Richard III.'

† Hutton's 'Bosworth Field.'

heard of their disclosures, though related by the second hand." This "living within less than forty years" would take us back to about the period which we are now viewing in relation to the life of Shakspere. But certainly there is something over-marvellous in Burton's story, to enable us to think that William Shakspere, even as a very young boy, could have conversed with "some persons thereabout" who had seen a battle fought in 1485. That, as Burton more reasonably of himself says, he might have "heard their discourses at second-hand" is probable enough. Bosworth Field is about thirty miles from Stratford. Burton says that the plain derives its name from Bosworth, "not that this battle was fought at this place (it being fought in a large, flat plain, and spacious ground, three miles distant from this town, between the towns of Shenton, Sutton, Dadlington, and Stoke); but for that this town was the most worthy town of note near adjacent, and was therefore called Bosworth Field. That this battle was fought in this plain appeareth by many remarkable places: By a little mount cast up, where the common report is, that at the first beginning of the battle Henry Earl of Richmond made his parænetical oration to his army; by divers pieces of armour, weapons, and other warlike accoutrements, and by many arrowheads here found, whereof, about twenty years since, at the enclosure of the lordship of Stoke, great store were digged up, of which some I have now (1622) in my custody, being of a long, large, and big proportion, far greater than any now in use; as also by relation of the inhabitants, who have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory."* Burton goes on to tell two stories connected with the eventful battle. The one was the vision of King Richard, of "divers fearful ghosts running about him, not suffering him to take any rest, still crying 'Revenge.'" Hall relates the tradition thus:—"The fame went that he had the same night a dreadful and a terrible dream, for it seemed to him, being asleep, that he saw divers images like terrible devils, not suffering him to take any quiet or rest." Burton says, previous to his description of the dream, "The vision is *reported* to be in this manner." And certainly his account of the fearful ghosts "still crying Revenge" is essentially different from that of the chronicler. Shakspere has followed the more poetical account of the old local historian; which, however, could not have been known to him:—

> "Methought the souls of all that I have murther'd
> Came to my tent: and every one did threat
> To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard."

Did Shakspere obtain his notion from the same source as Burton—from "relation of the inhabitants who have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory?" The topographer has another story, not quite so poetical, which the dramatist does not touch: "It was foretold, that if ever King Richard did come to meet his adversary in a place that was compassed with towns whose termination was in *ton* (what number is adjacent may, by the map, be per-

* From Burton's Manuscripts, quoted by Mr. Nicholls.

ceived), that there he should come to great distress; or else, upon the same occasion, did happen to lodge at a place beginning and ending with the same syllable of *An* (as this of *Anbian*), that there he should lose his life, to expiate that wicked murder of his late wife Anne, daughter and coheir of Richard Neville Earl of Salisbury and Warwick." This is essentially a local tradition. The prediction and the vision were in all likelihood rife in Sutton, and Shenton, and Sibson, and Coton, and Dadlington, and Stapleton, and Atherston, in the days of Shakspere's boyhood. Anbian, or Ambiam, a small wood, is in the centre of the plain called Bosworth Field. Tradition has pointed out a hillock where Richard harangued his army; and also a little spring, called King Richard's Well. Dr. Parr, about forty years ago, found out a well "in dirty, mossy ground," in the midst of this plain; and then a *Latin* inscription was to be set up to enlighten the peasantry of the district, and to preserve the memory of the spot for all time. Two words about the well in Shakspere would have given it a better immortality.

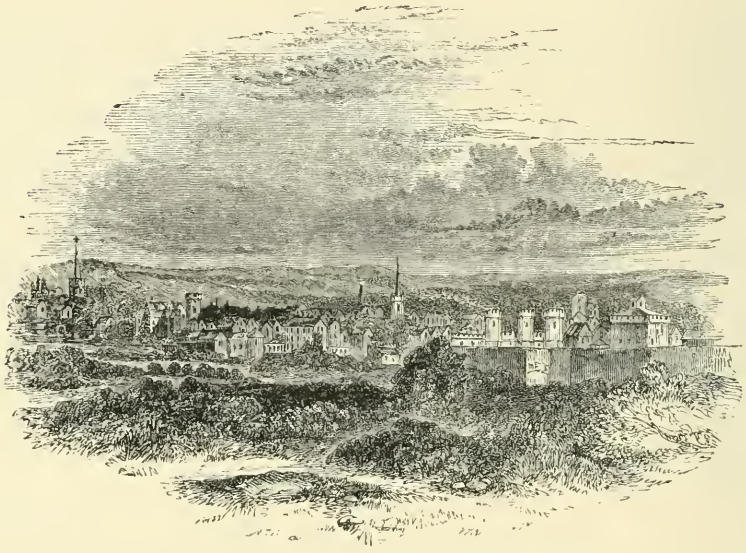
King Henry is crowned upon the Field of Bosworth. According to the Chronicler, Lord Stanley "took the crown of King Richard, which was found amongst the spoil in the field, and set it on the Earl's head, as though he had been elected king by the voice of the people, as in ancient times past in divers realms it hath been accustomed." Then, "the same night in the evening King Henry with great pomp came to the town of Leicester," where he rested two days. "In the mean season the dead corpse of King Richard was as shamefully carried to the town of Leicester, as he gorgeously the day before with pomp and pride departed out of the said town."

Years roll on. There was another conqueror, not by arms but by peaceful intellect, who had once moved through the land in "pomp and pride," but who came to Leicester in humility and heaviness of heart. The victim of a shifting policy and of his own ambition, Wolsey, found a grave at Leicester scarcely more honourable than that of Richard:—

> "At last, with easy roads, he came to Leicester,
> Lodg'd in the abbey; where the reverend abbot,
> With all his convent, honourably receiv'd him;
> To whom he gave these words:—'O, father abbot,
> An old man, broken with the storms of state,
> Is come to lay his weary bones among ye;
> Give him a little earth for charity!'
> So went to bed; where eagerly his sickness
> Pursued him still; and three nights after this,
> About the hour of eight, (which he himself
> Foretold should be his last,) full of repentance,
> Continual meditations, tears, and sorrows,
> He gave his honours to the world again,
> His blessed part to heaven, and slept in peace."*

* Henry VIII., Act IV., Scene II.

Wolsey is the hero of Shakspere's last historical play; and even in this history, large as it is, and belonging to the philosophical period of the poet's life, we may trace something of the influence of the principle of Local Association.



[Leicester.]

[Evesham. The Bell-Tower.]

CHAPTER XIII.

RUINS, NOT OF TIME.

"High towers, fair temples, goodly theatres,
Strong walls, rich porches, princely palaces,
Large streets, brave houses, sacred sepulchres,
Sure gates, sweet gardens, stately galleries,
Wrought with fair pillars and fine imageries;
All these, O pity! now are turn'd to dust,
And overgrown with black oblivion's rust."

Such is Spenser's noble description of what was once the "goodly Verlam." These were "The Ruins of Time." But within sixteen miles of Stratford would the young Shakspere gaze in awe and wonder upon ruins more solemn than any produced by "time's decay." The ruins of Evesham were the fearful

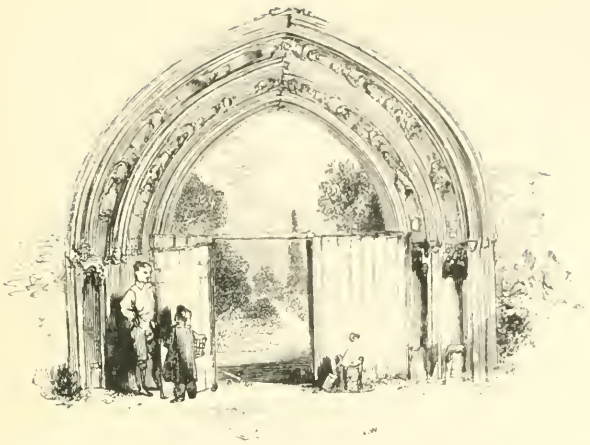
monuments of a political revolution which William Shakspere himself had not seen; but which, in the boyhood of his father, had shaken the land like an earthquake, and, toppling down its "high steeples," had made many

> "An heap of lime and sand,
> For the screech-owl to build her baleful bower."

Such were the ruins he looked upon, cumbering the ground where, forty years before, stood the magnificent abbey whose charters reached back to the days of the Kings of Mercia.

The last great building of the Abbey of Evesham is the only one properly belonging to the monastery which has escaped destruction. The campanile which formed an entrance to the conventual cemetery was commenced by Abbot Lichfield in 1533. In 1539 the good abbot resigned the office which he had held for twenty-six years. His successor was placed in authority for a few months to carry on the farce which was enacting through the kingdom, of a voluntary grant and surrender of all the remaining possessions of the religious houses, which preceded the Act of 1539 "for dissolution of abbeys." Leland, who visited the place within a year or two after the suppression, "rambling to and fro in this nation, and in making researches into the bowels of antiquity,"* says, "In the town is no hospital, or other famous foundation, but *the late* abbey." The destruction must indeed have been rapid. The house and site of the monastery were granted to Philip Hobby, with a remarkable exception; namely, "all the bells and *lead* of the church and belfry." The roof of this magnificent fabric thus went first; and in a few years the walls became a stone-quarry. Fuller, writing about a century afterwards, says of the abbey, "By a long lease it was in the possession of one Mr. Andrewes, father and son; whose grandchild, living now at Berkhampstead in Hertfordshire, hath better thriven, by God's blessing on his own industry, than his father and grandfather did with Evesham Abbey; the sale of the stones whereof he imputeth a cause of their ill success."† All was swept away. The abbey-church, with its sixteen altars, and its hundred and sixty-four gilded pillars,‡ its chapter-house, its cloisters, its library, refectory, dormitory, buttery, and treasury; its almery, granary, and storehouse; all the various buildings for the service of the church, and for the accommodation of eighty-nine religious inmates and sixty-five servants, were, with a few exceptions, ruins in the time of William Shakspere. Habingdon, who has left a manuscript 'Survey of Worcestershire,' written about two centuries ago, says, "Let us but guess what this monastery now dissolved was in former days by the gate-house yet remaining; which, though deformed with age, is as large and stately as any at this time in the kingdom." That gateway has since perished. Of the great mass of the conventual buildings Habingdon states that nothing was left beyond "a huge deal of rubbish overgrown with grass." One beautiful gateway, however, formerly the entrance to the chapter-house, yet remains even to our day. It admits us to a large garden, now let

* Wood, 'Athenæ Oxon.' † Church History.
‡ Dugdale's 'Monasticon,' ed 1819, vol. ii., p. 12.



out in small allotments to poor and industrious inhabitants of Evesham. The change is very striking. The independent possession of a few roods of land may perhaps bestow as much comfort upon the labourers of Evesham as their former dependence upon the conventual buttery. But we cannot doubt that, for a long course of years, the sudden and violent dissolution of that great abbey must have produced incalculable poverty and wretchedness. Its princely revenues were seized upon by the heartless despot, to be applied to his unbridled luxury and his absurd wars. The same process of destruction and appropriation was carried on throughout the country. The Church, always a gentle landlord, was succeeded in its possessions by the grasping creatures of the Crown; the almsgiving of the religious houses was at an end; and then came the age of vagabondage and of poor-laws. The general effects of the dissolution of the abbeys have been well described by Edmund Howes:—

"In the time of Henry VIII. the clergy was exceeding rich and powerful, and were endowed with wondrous stately palaces and great possessions, so as in every city, and county, and towns corporate, and in very many remote places, then were very strong and sumptuous houses for religious persons: as abbeys, priories, friaries, monks regular, minories, chantries, nunneries, and such-like; at which time the clergy grew proud, negligent, and secure, presuming, like the Knights Templars, upon their proper greatness, as well in regard of the reasons aforesaid, as that every Lord Abbot and Lord Prior that wore mitre sat in the upper Parliament and had free voices, as Barons, subsistent with the Bishops. The Lords, and Ladies Abbesses, of which houses were usually of noble birth, and sometime of the blood royal, as well women as men; for by this time, through the charitable devotion and special affection of former kings, princes, peers, and common people, the monasteries were so much increased, gloriously builded and adorned, and plenteously endowed with large privileges, possessions, and all things necessary. Albeit they relieved the poor, and raised no rents, nor took excessive fines, yet they many ways neglected

their duty to God and man, being verily persuaded their estate and safety to be more safe and secure than ever was any condition of people, because their houses were repaired, their rents increased, their churches new builded and beautified, even to the very day of their general dissolution, which came suddenly upon them, like the universal deluge. For, whilst the religious persons thus flattered and secured themselves, the King obtained the ecclesiastical supremacy into his particular possession, and therewithal had power given him by Parliament, to survey and reform the abuses of all those houses and persons above said: but the King, because he would go the next way to work, overthrew them, razed them; many ruins of them remain a testimony thereof to this day: whereat many of the peers and common people murmured, because they expected that the abuses should have been only reformed, and the rest have still remained. The general plausible project which caused the Parliament consent unto the reformation or alteration of the monasteries was that the King's exchequer should for ever be enriched, the kingdom and nobility strengthened and increased, and the common subjects acquainted [acquitted] and freed from all former services and taxes, to wit, that the abbots, monks, friars, and nuns, being suppressed, that then in their places should be created forty earls, threescore barons, and three thousand knights, and forty thousand soldiers, with skilful captains, and competent maintenance for them all, ever out of the ancient churches' revenues, so as, in so doing, the King and successors should never want of treasure of their own, nor have cause to be beholding to the common subjects, neither should the people be any more charged with loans, subsidies, and fifteens. Since which time, there have been more statute-laws, subsidies, and fifteens than five hundred years before. And not long after that the King had subsidies granted, and borrowed great sums of money, and died in debt, and the forenamed religious houses were utterly ruinated, whereat the clergy, peers, and common people were all sore grieved, but could not help it."*

The sense which we justly entertain of the advantages of the Reformation has accustomed us to shut our eyes to the tremendous evils which must have been produced by the iniquitous spoliations of the days of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. The religious houses, whatever might have been their abuses, were centres of civilization. Leland says, "There was no town at Evesham before the foundation of the abbey." Wherever there was a well-endowed religious house, there was a large and a regular expenditure, employing the local industry in the way best calculated to promote the happiness of the population. Under this expenditure, not only did handicrafts flourish, but the arts were encouraged in no inconsiderable degree. The commissioners employed to take surrender of the monasteries in Warwickshire reported of the nunnery of Polsworth, "that in this town were then forty-four tenements, and but one plough, the residue of the inhabitants being artificers, who had their livelihood by this house."† In another place Dugdale says, "Nor is it a little observable that, whilst the monasteries stood, there was no act for relief of the poor, so amply

* Continuation of Stow's 'Chronicle.'

† Dugdale's 'Warwickshire,' p. 800

did those houses give succour to them that were in want; whereas in the next age, namely 39th of Elizabeth, no less than eleven bills were brought into the House of Commons for that purpose."* We have little doubt that the judicious encouragement of industry in the immediate neighbourhood of each monastery did a great deal more to render a state provision for the poor unnecessary than the accustomed "succour to those who were in want." The benevolence of the religious houses was systematic and uniform. It was not the ostentatious and improvident almsgiving which would raise up an idle pauper population upon their own lands. The poor, as far as we can judge from the acts of law-makers, did not become a curse to the country, and were not dealt with in the spirit of a detestable severity, until the law-makers had dried up the sources of their profitable industry. Leland, writing immediately after the dissolution of the Abbey of Evesham, says of the town that it is "meetly large and well builded with timber; the market-sted is fair and large; there be divers pretty streets in the town." While the abbey stood there was an annual disbursement there going forward which has been computed to be equal to eighty thousand pounds of our present money.† The revenues, principally

* Dugdale's 'Warwickshire,' p. 803.

† 'History of Evesham,' by George May. A remarkably intelligent local guide.

[The Parish Churches, Evesham.]

derived from manors and tenements in eight different counties, are seized upon by the Crown. The site of the abbey is sold or granted to a private person, who will derive his immediate advantage by the rapid destruction of a pile of buildings which the piety and magnificence of five or six centuries had been rearing. More than a hundred and fifty inmates of this monastery are turned loose upon the world, a few with miserable pensions, but the greater number reduced to absolute indigence. Half the population at least of the town of Evesham must have derived a subsistence from the expenditure of these inmates, and this fountain is now almost wholly dried up. In the youth of William Shakspere it is impossible that Evesham could have been other than a ruined and desolate place. Not only would its monastic buildings be destroyed, but its houses would be untenanted and dilapidated; its reduced population idle and dispirited. Its two beautiful parish churches, situated close to the precincts of the abbey, escaped the common destruction of 1539; but till within the last seven years that of St. Lawrence had been long disused, and had fallen into ruin. It is now restored; for after three centuries of destruction and neglect we have begun to cherish some respect for what remains of our noble ecclesiastical edifices.

The act for the suppression of the smaller religious houses (27th Henry VIII.) recites that "manifest sin, vicious, carnal, and abominable living, is daily used and committed amongst the little and small abbeys, priories, and other religious houses." But in suppressing and confiscating all such small houses, whose annual expenditure is not two hundred pounds, the same statute affirms that, in the "great solemn monasteries of this realm, thanks be to God, religion is right well kept and observed." The smaller houses were destroyed, according to the statute, through the ardent desire of the King's most royal majesty for "the increase, advancement, and exaltation of true doctrine and virtue in the said church." And yet, in four years, the "great solemn monasteries of this realm, wherein, thanks be to God, religion is right well kept and observed," were also utterly suppressed and annihilated, under the pretence that they had been voluntarily surrendered to the King. It was the policy of the unscrupulous reformers—who, whatever service they may ultimately have worked in the destruction of superstitious observances, were, as politicians, the most dishonest and rapacious—it was their policy, when (to use their own heartless cant) they had driven away the crows and destroyed their nests, to heap every opprobrium upon the heads of the starving and houseless brethren, of whom it has been computed that fifty thousand were wandering through the land. The young Shakspere was in all probability brought into contact with some of the aged men who had been driven from the peaceful homes of their youth, where they had been brought up in scholastic exercises, and had looked forward to advance in honourable office, each in his little world. Some one of the Grey Friars of Coventry, or the Benedictines of Evesham, must he have encountered, hovering round the scenes of their ancient prosperity; sheltered perhaps in the cottage of some old servant who could labour with his hands, and upon whom the common misfortune therefore had

[Old Houses, Evesham.]

fallen lightly. The friars of the future great dramatist would, of necessity, be characters formed either out of his early observation, or moulded according to the general impressions of his early associates. In his mature life the race would be extinct. These his dramatic representations are wonderfully consistent; and it is manifest that he looked upon the persecuted order with pity and with respect. It was for Chaucer to satirize the monastic life in the days of its greatness and abundance. It was for this rare painter of manners to show the grasping, dissimulating friar, sitting down upon the churl's bench, and endeavouring to frighten or wheedle the bed-ridden man out of his money:—

> "Thomas, nought of your tresor I desire
> As for myself, but that all our covent
> To pray for you is aye so diligent."

The ridicule in those times of the Church's pride might be salutary; but other days had come. The most just and tolerant moralist that ever helped to disencumber men of their hatreds and prejudices has consistently endeavoured to represent the monastic character as that of virtue and benevolence. One of Shakspere's earliest plays is Romeo and Juliet; and many of the rhymed portions of that delicious tragedy might have been the desultory compositions of a very young poet, to be hereafter moulded into the dramatic form. Such is the graceful soliloquy which first introduces Friar Lawrence. The kind old man going forth from his cell in the morning twilight to fill his osier basket with weeds and flowers, and moralizing on the properties of plants which at once yield poison and medicine, has all the truth of individual portraiture. But Friar Lawrence is also the representative of a class. The Infirmarist of a monastic house, who had charge of the sick brethren, was often in the early days of medical science their sole physician. The book-knowledge and the expe-

rience of such a valuable member of a conventual body would still allow him to exercise useful functions when thrust into the world ; and the young Shakspere may have known some kindly old man, full of axiomatic wisdom, and sufficiently confident in his own management, like the well-meaning Friar Lawrence. In Much Ado about Nothing, it is the friar who, when Hero is unjustly accused by him who should have been her husband, vindicates her reputation with as much sagacity as charitable zeal :—

> " I have mark'd
> A thousand blushing apparitions start
> Into her face ; a thousand innocent shames
> In angel whiteness bear away those blushes ;
> And in her eye there hath appear'd a fire,
> To burn the errors that these princes hold
> Against her maiden truth :—Call me a fool ;
> Trust not my reading, nor my observations,
> Which with experimental seal doth warrant
> The tenor of my book ; trust not my age,
> My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
> If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
> Under some biting error."

In Measure for Measure the whole plot is carried on by the Duke assuming the reverend manners, and professing the active benevolence, of a friar ; and his agents and confidants are Friar Thomas and Friar Peter. In an age when the prejudices of the multitude were flattered and stimulated by abuse and ridicule of the ancient ecclesiastical character, Shakspere always exhibits it so as to command respect and affection. The poisoning of King John by a monk, " a resolved villain," is despatched by him with little more than an allusion. The Germans believe that Shakspere wrote the Old King John, in two Parts. The vulgar exaggeration of the basest calumnies against the monastic character satisfies us that the play was written by one who formed a much lower estimate than Shakspere did of the dignity of the poet's office, as an instructor of the people.

A deep reverence for antiquity is one of the clearest indications of the intimate union of the poetical and the philosophical temperament. An able writer of our own day has indeed said, " In some, the love of antiquity produces a sort of fanciful illusion : and the very sight of those buildings, so magnificent in their prosperous hour, so beautiful even in their present ruin, begets a sympathy for those who founded and inhabited them."* But, rightly considered, the fanciful illusion becomes a reasonable principle. Those who founded and inhabited these monastic buildings were for ages the chief directors of the national mind. Their possessions were, in truth, the possessions of all classes of the people. The highest offices in those establishments were in some cases bestowed upon the noble and the wealthy, but they were open to the very humblest. The studious and the devout here found a shelter and a solace. The learning of the monastic bodies has been underrated ; the ages in which they flourished have been

* Hallam's ' Constitutional History of England.'

called dark ages; but they were almost the sole depositaries of the knowledge of the land. They were the historians, the grammarians, the poets. They accumulated magnificent libraries. They were the barriers that checked the universal empire of brute force. They cherished an ambition higher and more permanent than could belong to the mere martial spirit. They stood between the strong and the weak. They held the oppressor in subjection to that power which results from the cultivation, however misdirected, of the spiritual part of our nature. Whilst the proud baron continued to live in the same dismal castle that his predatory fathers had built or won, the churchmen went on from age to age adding to their splendid edifices, and demanding a succession of ingenious artists to carry out their lofty ideas. The devotional exercises of their life touched the deepest feelings of the human heart. Their solemn services, handed down from a remote antiquity, gave to music its most ennobling cultivation; and the most beautiful of arts thus became the vehicle of the loftiest enthusiasm. Individuals amongst them, bringing odium upon the class, might be sordid, luxurious, idle, in some instances profligate. It is the nature of great prosperity and apparent security to produce these results. But it was not the mandate of a pampered tyrant, nor the edicts of a corrupt parliament, that could destroy the reverence which had been produced by an intercourse of eight hundred years with the great body of the people. The form of venerable institutions may be changed, but their spirit is indestructible. The holy places and mansions of the Church were swept away; but the memory of them could not be destroyed. Their ruins, recent as they were, were still antiquities, full of instruction. The lightning had blasted the old oak, and its green leaves were no longer put forth; but the gnarled trunk was a thing not to be despised. The convulsion which had torn the land was of a nature to make deep thinkers. After the wonder and the disappointment of great revolutions have subsided, there must always be an outgushing of earnest thought. The form which that thought may assume may be the result of accident; it may be poetical or metaphysical, historical or scientific. By a combination of circumstances,—perhaps by the circumstance of one man being born who had the most marvellous insight into human nature, and whose mind could penetrate all the disguises of the social state,—the drama became the great exponent of the thought of the age of Elizabeth. It was altogether a new form for English poetry to put on. The drama, as we have seen, had been the humblest vehicle for popular excitement. When the Church ceased to use it as an instrument of instruction, it fell into the hands of illiterate mimics. The courtly writers were too busy with their affectations and their flatteries to recognise its power, and its especial applicability to the new state of society. Those who were of the people; who watched the manifestations of the popular feeling and understanding; whose minds had been stirred up by the political storms, the violence of which had indeed passed away, but under whose influence the whole social state still heaved like a disturbed sea;—those were to build up our great national drama. But, at the period of which we are speaking, they were for the most part boys, or very young men. It is perhaps for-

tunate for us that the most eminent of these was introduced to the knowledge of life under no particular advantages; was not dedicated to any one of the learned professions; was cloistered not in an university; was an adherent of no party; was obliged to look forward to the necessity of earning his own maintenance, and yet not humiliated by poverty and meanness. William Shakspere looked upon the very remarkable state of society with which he was surrounded, with a free spirit. But he saw at one and the same time the present and the past. He knew that the entire social state is a thing of progress; that the characters of men are as much dependent upon remote influences as upon the matters with which they come in daily contact; that the individual essentially belongs to the general, and the temporary to the universal. His drama can never be antiquated, because he primarily deals with whatever is permanent and indestructible in the aspects of external nature, and in the constitution of the human mind. But at the same time it is no less a faithful transcript of the prevailing modes of thought even of his own day. Individual peculiarities, in his time called humours, he left to others.

This principle of looking at life with an utter disregard of all party and sectarian feelings, of massing all his observations upon individual character, could have proceeded only from a profound knowledge of the past, and a more than common apprehension of the future. As we have endeavoured to show, the localities amidst which he lived were highly favourable to his cultivation of a poetical reverence for antiquity. But his unerring observation of the present prevented the past becoming to him an illusion. He had always an earnest patriotism; he had a strong sense of the blessings which had been conferred upon his own day through the security won out of peril and suffering by the middle classes. The destruction of the old institutions, after the first evil effects had been mitigated by the energy of the people, had diffused capital, and had caused it to be employed with more activity. But he, who scarcely ever stops to notice the political aspects of his own day, cannot forbear an indignant comment upon the sufferings of the very poorest, which, if not caused by, were at least coincident with, the great spoliation of the property of the Church. Poor Tom, "who is whipped from tithing to tithing, and stocked, punished, and imprisoned,"* was no fanciful portrait; he is the creature of the pauper legislation of half a century. Exhortations in the churches, "for the furtherance of the relief of such as were in unfeigned misery," were prescribed by the statute of the 1st of Edward VI.; but the same statute directs that the unhappy wanderer, after certain forms of proving that he has not offered himself for work, shall be marked V with a hot iron upon his breast, and adjudged to be "*a slave*" for two years to him who brings him before justices of the peace; and the statute goes on to direct the slave-owner "to cause the said slave to work by beating, chaining, or otherwise." Three years afterwards the statute is repealed, seeing that it could not be carried into effect by reason of the multitude of vagabonds and the extremity of their wants. The whipping and the stocking were applied by successive enactments of Elizabeth. The

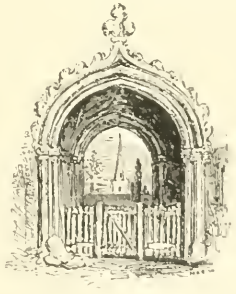
* King Lear, Act III., Scene IV.

gallows, too, was always at hand to make an end of the wanderers when, hunted from tithing to tithing, they inevitably became thieves. Nothing but a compulsory provision for the maintenance of the poor could then have saved England from a fearful Jacquerie. It cannot reasonably be doubted that the vast destruction of capital by the dissolution of the monasteries threw for many years a quantity of superfluous labour upon the yet unsettled capital of the ordinary industry of the country. That Shakspere had witnessed much of this misery is evident from his constant disposition to descry "a soul of goodness in things evil," and from his indignant hatred of the heartlessness of petty authority:—

"Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand."*

And yet, with many social evils about him, the age of Shakspere's youth was one in which the people were making a great intellectual progress. The poor were ill provided for. The Church was in an unsettled state, attacked by the natural restlessness of those who looked upon the Reformation with regret and hatred, and by the rigid enemies of its traditionary ceremonies and ancient observances, who had sprung up in its bosom. The promises which had been made that education should be fostered by the State had utterly failed; for even the preservation of the universities, and the protection and establishment of a few grammar-schools, had been unwillingly conceded by the avarice of those daring statesmen who had swallowed up the riches of the ancient establishment. The genial spirit of the English yeomanry had received a check from the intolerance of the powerful sect who frowned upon all sports and recreations—who despised the arts—who held poets and pipers to be "caterpillars of a commonwealth." But yet the wonderful stirring up of the intellect of the nation had made it an age favourable for the cultivation of the highest literature; and most favourable to those who looked upon society, as the young Shakspere must have looked, in the spirit of cordial enjoyment and practical wisdom.

* Lear, Act IV., Scene VI.



[Bengeworth Church, seen through the Arch of the Bell-Tower.]

[Welford. The Wake.]

CHAPTER XIV.

SOCIAL HOURS.

I.—The Wake.

Decay, followed by reproduction, is the order of nature; and so, if the vital power of society be not extinct, the men of one generation attempt to repair what the folly or the wickedness of their predecessors has destroyed. Sumptuous abbeys were pulled down in the reign of Henry VIII.; but humble parish-churches rose up in the reign of Elizabeth. Within four miles of Stratford, on the opposite bank of the Avon, is the pretty village of Welford; and here is a church which bears the date of 1568 carved upon its wall. Although the church was new, the people would cling, and perhaps more pertinaciously than ever, to the old usages connected with their church. They certainly would

not forego their Wake,—"an ancient custom among the Christians of this island to keep a feast every year upon a certain week or day in remembrance of the finishing of the building of their parish-church, and of the first solemn dedicating of it to the service of God."* For fifty years after the period of which we are writing, the wakes prevailed, more or less, throughout England. The Puritans had striven to put them down; but the opposite party in the Church as zealously encouraged them. Charles I. spoke the voice of this party in one of his celebrated declarations for sports, which gave such deep, and in some respects just, offence. In 1633 the King's declaration in favour of wakes was as follows:—"In some counties of this kingdom, his Majesty finds that, under pretence of taking away abuses, there hath been a general forbidding, not only of ordinary meetings, but of the feasts of the dedication of the churches, commonly called Wakes. Now, his Majesty's express will and pleasure is, that these feasts, with others, shall be observed; and that his justices of the peace, in their several divisions, shall look to it, both that all disorders there may be prevented or punished, and that all neighbourhood and freedom, with manlike and lawful exercises, be used."† Neighbourhood and freedom, and manlike exercises, were the old English characteristics of the wakes. At the period when William Shakspere was just entering upon life, with the natural disposition of youth, strongest perhaps in the more imaginative, to mingle in the recreations and sports of his neighbours with the most cordial spirit of enjoyment, the Puritans were beginning to denounce every assembly of the people that strove to keep up the character of merry England. Stubbes, writing at this exact epoch, says, describing "The manner of keeping of Wakesses," that "every town, parish, and village, some at one time of the year, some at another, but so that every one keep his proper day assigned and appropriate to itself (which they call their wake-day), useth to make great preparation and provision for good cheer; to the which all their friends and kinsfolks, far and near, are invited." Such were the friendly meetings in all mirth and freedom which the proclamation of Charles calls "neighbourhood." The Puritans denounced them as occasions of gluttony and drunkenness. Excess, no doubt, was occasionally there. The old hospitality could scarcely exist without excess. But it must not be forgotten that, whatever might be the distinction of ranks amongst our ancestors in all matters in which "coat-armour" was concerned, there was a hearty spirit of social intercourse, constituting a practical equality between man and man, which enabled all ranks to mingle without offence and without suspicion in these public ceremonials; and thus the civilization of the educated classes told upon the manners of the uneducated. There is no writer who furnishes us a more complete picture of this ancient freedom of intercourse than Chaucer. The company who meet at the Tabard, and eat the victual of the best, and drink the strong wine, and submit themselves to the merry host, and tell their tales upon the pilgrimage without the slightest restraint, are not only the very high and the very humble, but the men of professions and the

* Brand's 'Popular Antiquities,' by Ellis, 1841, vol. ii., p. 1.

† Rushworth's 'Collections,' quoted in Harris's 'Life of Charles I.'

men of trade, who in these later days too often jostle and look big upon the debateable land of gentility. And so, no doubt, this freedom existed to a considerable extent even in the days of Shakspere. In the next generation Herrick, a parish priest, writes,—

> "Come, Anthea, let us two
> Go to feast, as others do.
> Tarts and custards, creams and cakes,
> Are the junkets still at wakes:
> Unto which the tribes resort,
> Where the business is the sport."

With "the tribes" were mingled the stately squire, the reverend parson, and the well-fed yeoman; and, what was of more importance, their wives and daughters there exchanged smiles and courtesies. The more these meetings were frowned upon by the severe, the more would they be cherished by those who thought not that the proper destiny of man was unceasing labour and mortification. Some even of the most pure would exclaim, as Burton exclaimed after there had been a contest for fifty years upon the matter, "Let them freely feast, sing, and dance, have their puppet-plays, hobby-horses, tabors, crowds, bagpipes, &c., play at ball and barley-breaks, and what sports and recreations they like best!" *

From sunrise, then, upon a bright summer morning, are the country people in their holiday dresses hastening to Welford. It is the Baptist's day. There were some amongst them who had lighted the accustomed bonfires upon the hills on the vigil of the saint; and perhaps a maiden or two, clinging to the ancient superstitions, had tremblingly sat in the church-porch in the solemn twilight, or more daringly had attempted at midnight to gather the fern-seed which should make mortals "walk invisible." Over the bridges at Binton come the hill people from Temple Grafton and Billesley. Arden pours out its scanty population from the woodland hamlets. Bidford and Barton send in their tribes through the flat pastures on either bank of the river. From Stratford there is a pleasant and not circuitous walk by the Avon's side, now leading through low meadows, now ascending some gentle knoll, where a long reach of the stream may be traced, and now close upon the sedges and alders, with a glimpse of the river sparkling through the green. It is a merry company who follow along this narrow road; and there is a clear voice carolling

> "Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
> And merrily hent the stile-a:
> A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad tires in a mile-a." †

They soon cross the ferry at Ludington, and, passing through the village of Weston, they hear the church-bells of Welford sending forth a merry peal. At

* Anatomy of Melancholy, Part II., Sec. 2.

† Winter's Tale, Act IV., Scene II. The music of this song is given in the Pictorial Shakspere, and in Mr. Chappell's admirable collection of 'English National Airs.' We are indebted to Mr Chappell for many of the facts connected with our ancient music noticed in the present chapter.

length they reach the village. There is cordial welcome in every house. The tables of the Manor Hall are set out with a substantial English breakfast; and the farmer's kitchen emulates the same bounteous hospitality. In a little while the church-tower sends forth another note. A single bell tolls for matins. The church soon fills with a zealous congregation; not a seat is empty. The service for this particular feast is attended to with pious reverence; and when the people are invited to assist in its choral parts, they still show that, however the national taste for music may have been injured by the suppression of the chauntries, they are familiar with the fine old chaunts of their fathers, and can perform them with spirit and exactness, each according to his ability, but the most with some knowledge of musical science. The homily is ended. The sun shines glaringly through the white glass of this new church; and some of the Stratford people may think it fortunate that their old painted windows are not yet all removed.* The dew is off the green that skirts the churchyard; the pipers and crowders are ready; the first dance is to be chosen. Thomas Heywood, one of Shakspere's pleasant contemporaries, has left us a dialogue which shows how embarrassing was such a choice:—

"*Jack.* Come, what shall it be? 'Rogero?'
Jenkin. 'Rogero?' no; we will dance 'The beginning of the world.'
Sisly. I love no dance so well as 'John, come kiss me now.'
Nicholas. I have ere now deserv'd a cushion; call for the 'Cushion-dance.'
Roger. For my part, I like nothing so well as 'Tom Tyler.'
Jenkin. No; we'll have 'The hunting of the fox.'
Jack. 'The hay, The hay;' there's nothing like 'The hay.'
Jenkin. Let me speak for all, and we'll have 'Sellenger's round.'"†

Jenkin, who rejects 'Rogero,' is strenuous for 'The Beginning of the World,' and he carries his proposal by giving it the more modern name of 'Sellenger's Round.' The tune was as old as Henry VIII.; for it is mentioned in 'The History of Jack of Newbury,' by Thomas Deloney, whom Kemp called the great ballad-maker:—"In comes a noise of musicians in tawny coats, who, taking off their caps, asked if they would have any music? The widow answered, 'No; they were merry enough.' 'Tut!' said the old man; 'let us hear, good fellows, what you can do; and play me The Beginning of the World.'" A quaint tune is this, by whatever name it be known—an air not boisterous in its character, but calm and graceful;—a round dance "for as many as will;" who "take hands and go round twice, and back again," with a succession of figures varying the circular movement, and allowing the display of individual grace and nimbleness:—

* "All images, shrines, tabernacles, roodlofts, and monuments of idolatry are removed, taken down, and defaced; only the stories in glass windows excepted, which, for want of sufficient store of new stuff, and by reason of extreme charge that should grow by the alteration of the same into white panes throughout the realm, are not altogether abolished in most places at once, but by little and little suffered to decay, that white glass may be provided and set up in their rooms."—Harrison's 'Description of England:' 1586.

† A Woman Killed with Kindness. 1600.

"Each one, tripping on his toe,
Will be here with mop and mowe."*

The countryfolks of Shakspere's time put their hearts into the dance; and, as their ears were musical by education, their energy was at once joyous and elegant. Glad hearts are there even amongst those who are merely lookers-on upon this scene. The sight of happiness is in itself happiness; and there was real happiness in the "unreproved pleasures" of the youths and maidens

"Tripping the comely country-round
With daffodils and daisies crown'd." †

If Jenkin carried the voices for 'Sellenger's Round,' Sisly must next be gratified with 'John, come kiss me now.' Let it not be thought that Sisly called for a vulgar tune. This was one of the most favourite airs of Queen Elizabeth's 'Virginal Book,' and after being long popular in England it transmigrated into a "godly song" of Scotland. The tune is in two parts, of which the first part only is in the 'Virginal Book,' and this is a sweet little melody full of grace and tenderness. The more joyous revellers may now desire something more stirring, and call for 'Packington's Pound,' as old perhaps as the days of Henry VIII., and which survived for a couple of centuries in the songs of Ben Jonson and Gay.‡ The controversy about players, pipers, and dancers has fixed the date of some of these old tunes, showing us to what melodies the young Shakspere might have moved joyously in a round or a galliard. Stephen Gosson, for example, sneers at 'Trenchmore.' But we know that 'Trenchmore' was of an earlier date than Gosson's book. A writer who came twenty years after Gosson shows us that the 'Trenchmore' was scarcely to be reckoned amongst the graceful dances: "In this case, like one dancing the 'Trenchmore,' he stamped up and down the yard, holding his hips in his hands."‖ It was the leaping, romping dance, in which the exuberance of animal spirits delights. Burton says—"We must dance 'Trenchmore' over tables, chairs, and stools." Selden has a capital passage upon 'Trenchmore,' showing us how the sports of the country were adopted by the Court, until the most boisterous of the dancing delights of the people fairly drove out "state and ancientry." He says, in his 'Table Talk,'—"The Court of England is much altered. At a solemn dancing, first you had the grave measures, then the corantoes and the galliards, and this kept up with ceremony; and at length to 'Trenchmore' and the 'Cushion-dance:' then all the company dances, lord and groom, lady and kitchen-maid, no distinction. So in our Court in Queen Elizabeth's time, gravity and state were kept up; in King James's time things were pretty well; but in King Charles's time there has been nothing but 'Trenchmore' and the 'Cushion-dance,' omnium gatherum, tolly polly, hoite come toite." It was in this spirit that Charles II. at a court ball called for 'Cuckolds all arow,' which he said

* Tempest, Act IV., Scene II. † Herrick's 'Hesperides.'
‡ See Ben Jonson's song in 'Bartholomew Fair,' beginning—
"My masters, and friends, and good people, draw near."
§ See p. 56. ‖ Deloney's 'Gentle Craft:' 1598.

was "the old dance of England."* From its name, and its jerking melody, this would seem to be one of the country dances of parallel lines. They were each danced by the people; but the round dance must unquestionably have been the most graceful. Old Burton writes of it with a fine enthusiasm:—"It was a pleasant sight, to see those pretty knots and swimming figures. The sun and moon (some say) dance about the earth, the three upper planets about the sun as their centre,—now stationary, now direct, now retrograde; now in apogæo, then in perigæo; now swift, then slow; occidental, oriental; they turn round, jump and trace, ♀ and ☿ about the sun with those thirty-three Maculæ or Burbonian planets, *circa solem saltantes Cytharedum*, saith Fromundus. Four Medicean stars dance about Jupiter, two Austrian about Saturn, &c., and all (belike) to the music of the spheres."† 'Joan's Placket,' the delightful old tune that we yet beat time to, when the inspiriting song of 'When I followed a lass' comes across our memories,‡ would be a favourite upon the green at Welford; and surely he who in after-times said, "I did think by the excellent constitution of thy leg it was formed under the star of a galliard,"§ might strive not to resist the attraction of the air of 'Sweet Margaret,' and willingly surrender himself to the inspiration of its gentle and its buoyant movements. One dance he must take part in; for even the squire and the squire's lady cannot resist its charms,—the dance which has been in and out of fashion for two

* Pepys's 'Memoirs,' 8vo., vol., i. p. 359.

† 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' Part III., Sec. 2. Burton, the universal reader, might have caught the idea from Sir John Davies's 'Orchestra; or, a Poem expressing the Antiquity and Excellency of Dancing:'—

"Dancing, bright lady, then began to be,
When the first seeds whereof the world did spring,
The fire, air, earth, and water, did agree,
By Love's persuasion, Nature's mighty king,
To leave their first disorder'd combating;
And in a dance such measure to observe,
As all the world their motion should preserve.

Since when they still are carried in a round,
And, changing, come one in another's place;
Yet do they neither mingle nor confound,
But every one doth keep the bounded space
Wherein the dance doth bid it turn or trace
This wondrous miracle did Love devise,
For dancing is Love's proper exercise.

Like this, he fram'd the gods' eternal bower,
And of a shapeless and confused mass,
By his through-piercing and digesting power,
The turned vault of heaven formed was:
Whose starry wheels he hath so made to pass,
As that their movings do a music frame,
And they themselves still dance unto the same."

‡ Love in a Village. § Twelfth Night, Act I., Scene III.

centuries and a half, and has again asserted its rights in England, in despite of waltz and quadrille. We all know, upon the most undoubted testimony, that the Sir Roger de Coverley who to the lasting regret of all mankind caught a cold at the County Sessions, and died, in 1712, was the great-grandson of the worthy knight of Coverley, or Cowley, who "was inventor of that famous country-dance which is called after him."* Who can doubt, then, that William Shakspere might have danced this famous dance, in hall or on greensward, with its graceful advancings and retirings, its bows and curtsies, its chain figures, its pretty knots unravelled in simultaneous movement? In vain for the young blood of 1580 might Stubbes denounce peril to body and mind in his outcry against the "horrible vice of pestiferous dancing." The manner in which the first Puritans set about making people better, after the fashion of a harsh nurse to a froward child, was very remarkable. Stubbes threatens the dancers with lameness and broken legs, as well as with severer penalties; but, being constrained to acknowledge that dancing "is both ancient and general, having been used ever in all ages as well of the godly as of the wicked," he reconciles the matter upon the following principle:—"If it be used for man's comfort, recreation, and godly pleasure, *privately* (every sex distinct by themselves), whether with music or otherwise, it cannot be but *a very tolerable exercise.*" We doubt if this arrangement would have been altogether satisfactory to the young men and maidens at the Welford Wake, even if Philip Stubbes had himself appeared amongst them, with his unpublished manuscript in his pocket, to take the place of the pipers, crying out to them—"Give over, therefore, your occupations, you pipers, you fiddlers, you minstrels, and you musicians, you drummers, you tabretters, you fluters, and all other of that wicked brood."† Neither, when the flowing cup was going round amongst the elders to song and story, would he have been much heeded, had he himself lifted up his voice, exclaiming, "Wherefore should the whole town, parish, village, and country, keep one and the same day, and make such gluttonous feasts as they do?"‡ One young man might have answered, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?"§

Crossing the Avon by the ancient mill of Welford, we descend the stream for about a mile, till we reach the rising ground upon which stands the hamlet of Hillborough. This is the "haunted Hillborough" of the lines which tradition ascribes to Shakspere.‖ Assuredly the inhabitants of that fine old farm-house, still venerable in its massive walls and its mullioned windows, would be at the wake at Welford. They press the neighbours from Stratford to go a little out of their way homewards to accept their own hospitality. There is dance and merriment within the house, and shovel-board and tric-trac for the sedentary. But the evening is brilliant; for the sun is not yet setting behind Bardon Hill, and there is an early moon. There will be a game at Barley-Break in the field before the old House. The lots are cast; three damsels and three youths are

* Spectator, Nos. 2 and 517. † Anatomy of Abuses. ‡ Ibid.

§ Twelfth Night, Act II., Scene III. ‖ See p. 69

[Great Hillborough. Barley-break.]

chosen for the sport; a plot of ground is marked out into three compartments, in each of which a couple is placed,—the middle division bearing the name of hell. In that age the word was not used profanely nor vulgarly. Sidney and Browne and Massinger describe the sport. The couple who are in this condemned place try to catch those who advance from the other divisions, and we may imagine the noise and the laughter of the vigorous resistance and the coy yieldings that sounded on Hillborough, and scared the pigeons from their old dovecote. The difficulty of the game consisted in this—that the couple in the middle place were not to separate, whilst the others might loose hands whenever they pleased. Sidney alludes to this peculiarity of the game :—

> "There you may see, soon as the middle two
> Do, coupled, towards either couple make,
> They, false and fearful, do their hands undo."

But half a century after Sidney, the sprightliest of poets, Sir John Suckling, described the game of Barley-break with unequalled vivacity :—

> "Love, Reason, Hate, did once bespeak
> Three mates to play at barley-break;
> Love, Folly took; and Reason, Fancy;
> And Hate consorts with Pride; so dance they:
> Love coupled last, and so it fell
> That Love and Folly were in hell.
>
> They break, and Love would Reason meet,
> But Hate was nimbler on her feet;
> Fancy looks for Pride, and thither
> Hies, and they two hug together:

Yet this new coupling still doth tell
That Love and Folly were in hell.

The rest do break again, and Pride
Hath now got Reason on her side;
Hate and Fancy meet, and stand
Untouch'd by Love in Folly's hand;
Folly was dull, but Love ran well,
So Love and Folly were in hell."

The young Shakspere, whose mature writings touch lightly upon country sports, but who mentions them always as familiar things, would be the foremost in these diversions. He would "ride the wild mare with the boys,"* and "play at quoits well,"† and "change places" at "handy-dandy,"‡ and put out all his strength in a jump, though he might not expect to "win a lady at leap-frog,"§ and run the country-base" with "striplings,"‖ and be a "very good bowler."¶ It was not in solitude only that he acquired his wisdom. He knew

"All qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings,"**

through his intercourse with his fellows, and not by meditating upon abstractions. The meditation was to apply the experience and raise it into philosophy.

There is a temptation for the young men to make another day's holiday, resting at Hillborough through the night. No sprites are there to disturb the rest which has been earned by exercise. Before the sun is up they are in the dewy fields, for there is to be an otter-hunt below Bidford. The owner of the Grange, who has succeeded to the monks of Evesham, has his pack of otter-dogs. They are already under the marl-cliffs, busily seeking for the enemy of all anglers. "Look! down at the bottom of the hill there, in that meadow, checkered with water-lilies and lady-smocks; there you may see what work they make; look! look! you may see all busy; men and dogs; dogs and men; all busy." Thus does honest Izaak Walton describe such an animated scene The otter-hunt is now rare in England; but in those days, when field-sports had the double justification of their exercise and of their usefulness, the otter-hunt was the delight of the dwellers near rivers. Spear in hand, every root and hole in the bank is tried by watermen and landsmen. The water-dog, as the otter was called, is at length found in her fishy hole, near her whelps. She takes to the stream, amidst the barking of dogs and the shouts of men; horsemen dash into the fordable places; boatmen push hither and thither; the dogs have lost her, and there is a short silence; for one instant she comes up to the surface to breathe, and the dogs are after her. One dog has just seized her, but she bites him, and he swims away howling; she is under again, and they

* Henry IV., Act II., Scene IV. † Ibid. ‡ Lear, Act IV., Scene VI.
§ Henry V., Act V., Scene II. ‖ Cymbeline, Act V., Scene IV.
¶ Love's Labour's Lost, Act V., Scene II. ** Othello, Act III., Scene III.

[Marl Cliffs, near Bidford.]

are at fault. Again she rises, or, in the technical language, vents. "Now Sweetlips has her; hold her, Sweetlips! Now all the dogs have her; some above, and some under water: but now, now she is tired, and past losing." This is the catastrophe of the otter-hunt according to Walton. Somerville, in his grandiloquent blank verse, makes her die by the spears of the huntsmen.

When Izaak Walton and his friends have killed the otter, they go to their sport of angling. Shakspere in three lines describes "the contemplative man's recreation" as if he had enjoyed it:—

> "The pleasantest angling is to see the fish
> Cut with her golden oars the silver stream,
> And greedily devour the treacherous bait." *

The oldest books upon angling have something of that half poetical, half devout enthusiasm about the art which Walton made so delightful. Even the author of the 'Treatise of Fishing with an Angle,' in the 'Book of St. Albans,' talks of "the sweet air of the sweet savour of the mead-flowers," and the "melodious harmony of fowls;" and concludes the 'Treatise' thus:—"Ye shall not use this foresaid crafty disport for no covetyseness to the increasing and sparing of your money only, but principally for your solace, and to cause the health of your body, and specially of your soul; for when ye purpose to go on your disports in fishing ye will not desire greatly many persons with you, which might let

* Much Ado about Nothing, Act III., Scene I.

you of your game. And then ye may serve God devoutly in saying affectuously your customable prayer, and thus doing ye shall eschew and void many vices." * According to this good advice, with which he was doubtless familiar, would the young poet go alone to fish in the quiet nooks of his Avon. With his merry companions about him he would not try the water at Bidford on this day of the otter-hunt.

About a mile from the town of Bidford on the road to Stratford was, some twenty years ago, an ancient crab-tree well known to the country round as Shakspere's Crab-tree. The tradition which associates it with the name of Shakspere is, like many other traditions regarding the poet, an attempt to embody the general notion that his social qualities were as remarkable as his genius. In an age when excess of joviality was by some considered almost a virtue, the genial fancy of the dwellers at Stratford may have been pleased to confer upon this crab-tree the honour of sheltering Shakspere from the dews of night, on an occasion when his merrymakings had disqualified him from returning homeward, and he had laid down to sleep under its spreading branches. It is scarcely necessary to enter into an examination of this apocryphal story. But as the crab-tree is associated with Shakspere, it may fitly be made the scene of some of his youthful exercises. He may "cleave the pin" and strike the quintain in the neighbourhood of the crab-tree, as well as sleep heavily beneath its shade. We shall diminish no honest enthusiasm by changing the associa-

* 'The Treatyses perteynyng to Hawkynge, Huntynge, and Fisshynge with an Angle.' 1496

[Bidford.]

tion Indeed, although the crab-tree was long ago known by the name of Shakspere's Crab-tree, the tradition that he was amongst a party who had accepted a challenge from the Bidford topers to try which could drink hardest, and there bivouacked after the debauch, is difficult to be traced further than the hearsay evidence of Mr. Samuel Ireland. In the same way, the merry folks of Stratford will tell you to this day that the Falcon inn in that town was the scene of Shakspere's nightly potations, after he had retired from London to his native home; and they will show you the shovel-board at which he delighted to play. Harmless traditions, ye are yet baseless! The Falcon was not an inn at all in Shakspere's time, but a goodly private dwelling.

About the year 1580 the ancient practice of archery had revived in England. The use of the famous English long-bow had been superseded in war by the arquebuss; but their old diversion of butt-shooting would not readily be abandoned by the bold yeomanry, delighting as they still did in stories of their countrymen's prowess, familiar to them in chronicle and ballad. The 'Toxophilus' of Roger Ascham was a book well fitted to be amongst the favourites of our Shakspere; and he would think with that fine old schoolmaster that the book and the bow might well go together.* He might have heard that a wealthy yeoman of Middlesex, John Lyon, who had founded the grammar-school at Harrow, had instituted a prize for archery amongst the scholars. Had not the fame, too, gone forth through the country of the worthy 'Show and Shooting by the Duke of Shoreditch, and his Associates the Worshipful Citizens of London,'† and of 'The Friendly and Frank Fellowship of Prince Arthur's Knights in and about the City of London?'‡ There were men of Stratford who within a year or two had seen the solemn processions of these companies of archers, and their feats in Hogsden Fields; where the wealthy citizens and their ladies sat in their tents most gorgeously dressed, and the winners of the prizes were brought out of the field by torchlight, with drum and trumpet, and volleys of shot, mounted upon great geldings sumptuously trapped with cloths of silver and gold. Had he not himself talked with an ancient squire, who, in the elder days, at "Mile End Green" had played "Sir Dagonet at Arthur's Show?"§ And did he not know "old Double," who was now dead?—"He drew a good bow; and dead!—he shot a fine shoot: * * * Dead!—he would have clapped i' the clout at twelve score; and carried you a forehand shaft a fourteen and fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see."‖ Welcome to him, then, would be the invitation of the young men of Bidford for a day of archery; for they received as a truth the maxim of Ascham,—"That still, according to the old wont of England, youth should use it for the

* "Would to God that all men did bring up their sons, like my worshipful master Sir Henry Wingefield, in the book and the bow."—Ascham.

† This is the title of a tract published in 1583; but the author says that these mock solemnities had been "greatly revived, and within these five years set forward, at the great cost and charges of sundry chief citizens."

‡ The title of a tract by Richard Mulcaster: 1581.

§ Henry IV., Part II., Act III., Scene II. ‖ Ibid.

most honest pastime in peace." The butts are erected in the open fields after we cross the Ichnield way on the Stratford road. It is an elevated spot, which looks down upon the long pastures which skirt the Avon. These are not the ancient butts of the town, made and kept up according to the statute of Henry VIII.; nor do the young men compel their fathers, according to the same statute, to provide each of them with "a bow and two shafts," until they are of the age of seventeen; but each is willing to obey the statute, having "a bow and four arrows continually for himself." Their butts are mounds of turf, on which is fixed a small piece of circular paper with a pin in the centre. The young poet probably thought of Robin Hood's more picturesque mark :—

" 'On every syde a rose garlonde,
They shot under the lyne.
Whoso fayleth of the rose garlonde,' sayd Robin,
'His takyll he shall tyne.' "

At the crab-tree are the young archers to meet at the hour of eight :—

" Hold, or cut bowstrings." *

The costume of Chaucer's squire's yeoman would be emulated by some of the assembly :—

" He was cladde in cote and hode of grene;
A shefe of peacock arwes bright and kene
Under his belt he bare ful thriftily.
Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly:
His arwes drouped not with fetheres lowe.
And in his hond he bare a mighty bowe.
. . . . .
Upon his arme he bare a gaie bracer."

The lots are cast; three archers on either side. The marker takes his place, to "cry aim." Away flies the first arrow—"gone"—it is over the butt; a second —"short;" a third—"wide;" a fourth "hits the white,"—"Let him be clapped on the shoulder and called Adam;" † a fifth "handles his bow like a crow-keeper." ‡ Lastly comes a youth from Stratford, and he is within an inch of "cleaving the pin." There is a maiden gazing on the sport; she whispers a word in his ear, and "then the very pin of his heart" is "cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft." § He recovers his self-possession, whilst he receives his arrow from the marker, humming the while—

" The blinded boy, that shoots so trim,
From heaven down did hie;
He drew a dart and shot at him,
In place where he did lie." ‖

* Midsummer-Night's Dream, Act I., Scene II. † Much Ado about Nothing, Act I.
‡ Lear. § Romeo and Juliet, Act II., Scene IV.
‖ Ballad of 'King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid.'

[The Crab-tree.]

After repeated contests the match is decided. But there is now to be a trial of greater skill, requiring the strong arm and the accurate eye—the old English practice which won the day at Agincourt. The archers go up into the hills: he who has drawn the first lot suddenly stops; there is a bush upon the rising ground before him, from which hangs some rag, or weasel-skin, or dead crow; away flies the arrow, and the fellows of the archer each shoot from the same spot. This was the *roving* of the more ancient archery, where the mark was sometimes on high, and sometimes on the ground, and always at variable distances. Over hill and dale go the young men onward in the excitement of their exercise, so lauded by Richard Mulcaster, first Master of Merchant Tailors' School:—"And whereas hunting on foot is much praised, what moving of the body hath the foot-hunter in hills and dales which the roving archer hath not in variety of grounds? Is his natural heat more stirred than the archer's is? Is his appetite better than the archer's?"* This natural premonition sends the party homeward to their noon-tide dinner at the Grange. But as they pass along the low meadows they send up many a "flight," with shout and laughter. An arrow is sometimes lost. But there is one who in after-years recollected his boyish practice under such mishaps:—

> "In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft
> I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
> The self-same way, with more advised watch
> To find the other forth; and, by adventuring both,
> I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof,
> Because what follows is pure innocence.

* Positions: 1581.

I owe you much; and, like a wilful youth,
That which I owe is lost: but, if you please
To shoot another arrow that self way
Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
As I will watch the aim, or to find both,
Or bring your latter hazard back again,
And thankfully rest debtor for the first." *

There are other sports to be played, and other triumphs to be achieved, before the day closes. In the meadow, at some little distance from the butts, is fixed a machine of singular construction. It is the Quintain. Horsemen are beginning to assemble around it, and are waiting the arrival of the guests from the Grange, who are merry in "an arbour" of mine host's "orchard." But the youths are for more stirring matters; and their horses are ready. To the inexperienced eye the machine which has been erected in the field—

"That which here stands up,
Is but a quintain, a mere lifeless block." †

It is the wooden figure of a Saracen, sword in hand, grinning hideously upon the assailants who confront him. The horsemen form a lane on either side, whilst one, the boldest of challengers, couches his spear and rides violently at the enemy, who appears to stand firm upon his wooden post. The spear strikes the Saracen just on the left shoulder; but the wooden man receives not his wound with patience, for by the action of the blow he swings round upon his pivot, and hits the horseman a formidable thump with his extended sword before the horse has cleared the range of the misbeliever's weapon. Then one chorus of laughter greets the unfortunate rider as he comes dolefully back to the rear. Another and another fail. At last the quintain is struck right in the centre, and the victory is won. The Saracen conquered, a flat board is set up upon the pivot, with a sand-bag at one end, such as Stow has described:—"I have seen a quintain set upon Cornhill, by Leadenhall, where the attendants of the lords of merry disports have run and made great pastime; for he that hit not the board end of the quintain was laughed to scorn; and he that hit it full, if he rode not the faster, had a sound blow upon his neck with a bag full of sand hanged on the other end."‡ The merry guests of the Grange enjoy the sport as heartily as Master Laneham, who saw the quintain at Kenilworth:—"The speciality of the sport was to see how some of his slackness had a good bob with the bag; and some for his haste to topple downright, and come tumbling to the post; some striving so much at the first setting out, that it seemed a question between the man and the beast, whether the course should be made a horseback or a foot: and, put forth with the spurs, then would run his race by us among the thickest of the throng, that down came they together hand over head. * * * By my troth, Master Martin, 't was a goodly pastime." And now they go to supper,

"What time the labour'd ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came." §

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* The Merchant of Venice, Act I., Scene I.
† As You Like It, Act I., Scene III.
‡ Survey of London.
§ Milton: 'Comus.'

The moon shines brightly upon the terraced garden of the Grange. The mill-wheel is at rest. The ripple of the stream over the dam pleasantly breaks the silence which is around. There is merriment within the house, whose open casements welcome the gentle night-breeze. The chorus of a jovial song has just ceased. Suddenly a lute is struck upon the terrace of the garden, and three voices beneath the window command a mute attention. They are singing one of those lovely compositions which were just then becoming popular in England—the Madrigal, which the Flemings invented, the Italians cultivated, and which a few years after reached its perfection in our own country. The beautiful interlacings of the harmony, its "fine bindings and strange closes," * its points, each emulating the other, but each in its due place and proportion, required scientific skill as well as voice and ear. But the young men who sang the madrigal were equal to their task. There was one who listened till his heart throbbed and his eyes were wet with tears; for he was lifted above the earth by thoughts which he afterwards expressed in lines of wondrous loveliness:—

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears; soft stillness, and the night,
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.
There 's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins:
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it." †

The madrigal ceased; but the spirit of harmony which had been thus evoked was not allowed to be overlaid by ruder merriment. 'Watkin's Ale,' and 'The Carman's Whistle,' 'Peg-a-Ramsay,' 'Three merry men we be,' and 'Heartease,' were reserved for another occasion, when a fresh "stoup of wine" might be loudly called for, and the jolly company might roar out their "coziers' catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice." ‡ But there was many an "old and antique song," full of elegance and tenderness, to be heard that night. We were a musical people in the age of Elizabeth; but our music was no new fashion of the "brisk and giddy-paced times." There was abundant music with which the people were familiar, whether sad or lively, quaint or simple. There was many an air not to be despised by the nicest taste, of which it might be said,

"It is old and plain:
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
Do use to chant it; it is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love,
Like the old age." §

* Morley's 'Treatise:' 1597.
† Merchant of Venice, Act v., Scene i.
‡ Twelfth Night, Act ii., Scene iii.
§ Ibid., Act ii., Scene iv.

Such was the plaintive air of 'Robin Hood is to the Greenwood gone,' a line of which has been snatched from oblivion by Ophelia:—

"For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy."*

Such was the 'Light o' Love,'—the favourite of poets, if we may judge from its repeated mention in the old dramas. Such was the graceful tune which the young Shakspere heard that night with words which he had himself written for a friend:—

"O, mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear; your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers' meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

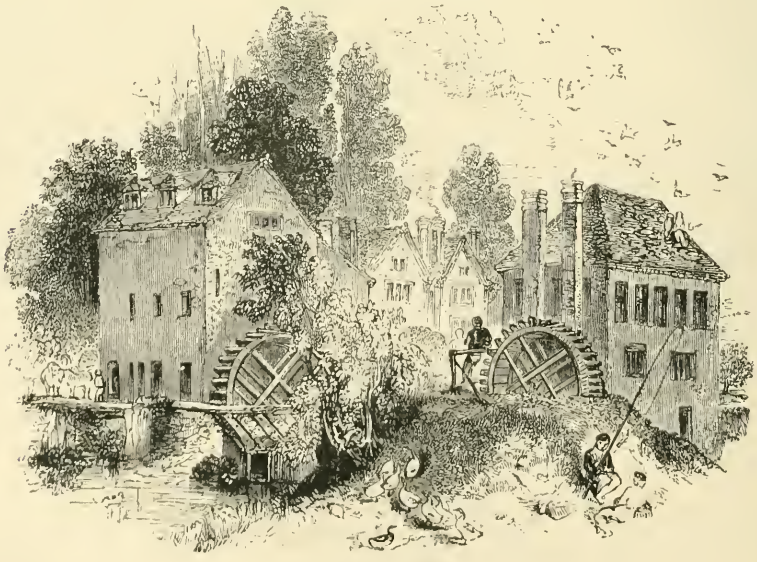
What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
Youth's a stuff will not endure."

And the challenge was received in all kindness; and the happy lover might say, with Sir Thomas Wyatt,

"She me caught in her arms long and small.
Therewithal sweetly she did me kiss,
And softly said, 'Dear heart, how like you this?'"—

for he was her accepted "servant,"—such a "servant" as Surrey sued to Geraldine to be,—the recognised lover, not yet betrothed, but devoted to his mistress with all the ardour of the old chivalry. In a few days they would be *handfasted;* they would make their public *troth-plight.*

* Hamlet, Act IV., Scene V.



[Bidford Grange.]

[Charlcote Church.]

II.—The Wedding.

Charlcote :—the name is familiar to every reader of Shakspere, but it is not presented to the world under the influence of pleasant associations with the world's poet. The story, which was first told by Rowe, must be here repeated: "An extravagance that he was guilty of forced him both out of his country, and that way of living which he had taken up; and though it seemed at first to be a blemish upon his good manners, and a misfortune to him, yet it afterwards happily proved the occasion of exerting one of the greatest geniuses that ever was known in dramatic poetry. He had, by a misfortune common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill company, and, amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of deer-stealing engaged him more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlcote, near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and, in order to revenge that ill usage, he made a ballad upon him. And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree, that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time, and shelter himself in London."* The good old gossip Aubrey is wholly

* Some Account of the Life of William Shakespear, written by Mr. Rowe.

silent about the deer-stealing and the flight to London, merely saying, "This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess about eighteen." But there were other antiquarian gossips of Aubrey's age, who have left us their testimony upon this subject. The Reverend William Fulman, a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, who died in 1688, bequeathed his papers to the Reverend Richard Davies of Sandford, Oxfordshire; and on the death of Mr. Davies, in 1708, these papers were deposited in the library of Corpus Christi. Fulman appears to have made some collections for the biography of our English poets, and under the name Shakspere he gives the dates of his birth and death. But Davies, who added notes to his friend's manuscripts, affords us the following piece of information: "He was much given to all unluckiness, in stealing venison and rabbits; particularly from Sir Lucy, who had him oft whipped, and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly his native country, to his great advancement. But his revenge was so great, that he is his Justice Clodpate, and calls him a great man, and that, in allusion to his name, bore three louses rampant for his arms." The accuracy of this chronicler, as to events supposed to have happened a hundred years before he wrote, may be inferred from his correctness in what was accessible to him. Justice Clodpate is a new character; and the three louses rampant have diminished strangely from the "dozen white luces" of Master Slender. In Mr. Davies's account we have no mention of the ballad—through which, according to Rowe, the young poet revenged his "ill usage." But Capell, the editor of Shakspere, found a new testimony to that fact: "The writer of his 'Life,' the first modern, [Rowe] speaks of a 'lost ballad,' which added fuel, he says, to the knight's before-conceived anger, and 'redoubled the prosecution;' and calls the ballad 'the first essay of Shakspere's poetry:' one stanza of it, which has the appearance of genuine, was put into the editor's hands many years ago by an ingenious gentleman (grandson of its preserver), with this account of the way in which it descended to him: Mr. Thomas Jones, who dwelt at Tarbick, a village in Worcestershire, a few miles from Stratford-on-Avon, and died in the year 1703, aged upwards of ninety, remembered to have heard from several old people at Stratford the story of Shakespeare's robbing Sir Thomas Lucy's park; and their account of it agreed with Mr. Rowe's, with this addition—that the ballad written against Sir Thomas by Shakespeare was stuck upon his park-gate, which exasperated the knight to apply to a lawyer at Warwick to proceed against him. Mr. Jones had put down in writing the first stanza of the ballad, which was all he remembered of it, and Mr. Thomas Wilkes (my grandfather) transmitted it to my father by memory, who also took it in writing." *

The first stanza of the ballad which Mr. Jones put down in writing as all he remembered of it, has been so often reprinted, that we can scarcely be justified in omitting it. It is as follows:—

"A parliamente member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scare-crowe, at London an asse;

* Notes and various Readings to Shakespeare, Part III., p. 75. See Note to this Chapter

If lowsie is Lucy, as some volke miscalle it,
Then Lucy is lowsie, whatever befall it.
He thinkes himself greate,
Yet an asse in his state
We allowe by his eares but with asses to mate.
If Lucy is lowsie, as some volke miscalle it,
Sing lowsie Lucy, whatever befalle it."

But the tradition sprang up in another quarter. Mr. Oldys, the respectable antiquarian, has also preserved this stanza, with the following remarks:—"There was a very aged gentleman living in the neighbourhood of Stratford (where he died fifty years since), who had not only heard from several old people in that town of Shakspeare's transgression, but could remember the first stanza of that bitter ballad, which, repeating to one of his acquaintance, he preserved it in writing, and here it is, neither better nor worse, but faithfully transcribed from the copy, which his relation very courteously communicated to me."* The copy preserved by Oldys corresponds word by word with that printed by Capell; and it is therefore pretty evident that each was derived from the same source,—the person who wrote down the verses from the memory of the one old gentleman. In truth, the whole matter looks rather more like an exercise of invention than of memory. Mr. De Quincey has expressed a very strong opinion "that these lines were a production of Charles II.'s reign, and applied to a Sir Thomas Lucy, not very far removed, if at all, from the age of him who first picked up the precious filth: the phrase 'parliament member' we believe to be quite unknown in the colloquial use of Queen Elizabeth." But he has overlooked a stronger point against the authenticity of the ballad. He says that "the scurrilous rondeau has been imputed to Shakspeare ever since the days of the credulous Rowe." This is a mistake. Rowe expressly says the ballad is "lost." It was not till the time of Oldys and Capell, nearly half a century after Rowe, that the single stanza was found. It was not published till seventy years after Rowe's "Life of Shakspeare." We have little doubt that the regret of Rowe that the ballad was lost was productive not only of the discovery, but of the creation, of the delicious fragment. By-and-by more was discovered, and the entire song "was found in a chest of drawers that formerly belonged to Mrs. Dorothy Tyler, of Shottery, near Stratford, who died in 1778, at the age of 80." This is Malone's account, who inserts the entire song in the Appendix to his posthumous "Life of Shakspeare," with the expression of his persuasion "that one part of this ballad is just as genuine as the other; that is, that the whole is a forgery." We believe, however, that the first stanza is an old forgery, and the remaining stanzas a modern one. If the ballad is held to be all of one piece, it is a self-evident forgery. But in the "entire song" the new stanzas have not even the merit of imitating the versification of the first attempt to degrade Shakspere to the character of a brutal doggrel-monger.

This, then, is the entire evidence as to the deer-stealing tradition. According to Rowe, the young Shakspere was engaged more than once in robbing a park, for which he was prosecuted by Sir Thomas Lucy; he made a ballad upon his prosecutor, and then, being more severely pursued, fled to London. According to

* MS. Notes upon Langbaine, from which Steevens published the lines in 1778.

Davies, he was much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits; for which he was often whipped, sometimes imprisoned, and at last forced to fly the country. According to Jones, the tradition of Rowe was correct as to robbing the park; and the obnoxious ballad being stuck upon the park-gate, a lawyer of Warwick was authorised to prosecute the offender. The tradition is thus full of contradictions upon the face of it. It necessarily would be so, for each of the witnesses speaks of circumstances that must have happened a hundred years before his time. We must examine the credibility of the tradition therefore by inquiring what was the state of the law as to the offence for which William Shakspere is said to have been prosecuted; what was the state of public opinion as to the offence; and what was the position of Sir Thomas Lucy as regarded his immediate neighbours.

The law in operation at the period in question was the 5th of Elizabeth, chapter 21. The ancient forest-laws had regard only to the possessions of the Crown; and therefore in the 32nd of Henry VIII. an Act was passed for the protection of "every inheritor and possessor of manors, land, and tenements," which made the killing of deer, and the taking of rabbits and hawks, felony. This Act was repealed in the 1st of Edward VI.; but it was quickly re-enacted in the 3rd and 4th of Edward VI. (1549 and 1550), it being alleged that unlawful hunting prevailed to such an extent throughout the realm, in the royal and private parks, that in one of the king's parks within a few miles of London five hundred deer were slain in one day. For the due punishment of such offences the taking of deer was again made felony. But the Act was again repealed in the 1st of Mary. In the 5th of Elizabeth it was attempted in Parliament once more to make the offence a capital felony. But this was successfully resisted; and it was enacted that, if any person by night or by day "wrongfully or unlawfully break or enter into any park empaled, or any other several ground closed with wall, pale, or hedge, and used for the keeping, breeding, and cherishing of deer, and so wrongfully hunt, drive, or chase out, or take, kill, or slay any deer within any such empaled park, or closed ground with wall, pale, or other enclosure, and used for deer, as is aforesaid," he shall suffer three months' imprisonment, pay treble damages to the party offended, and find sureties for seven years' good behaviour. But there is a clause in this Act (1562-3) which renders it doubtful whether the penalties for taking deer could be applied twenty years after the passing of the Act, in the case of Sir Thomas Lucy. "Provided always, That this Act, or anything contained therein, extend not to any park or enclosed ground hereafter to be made and used for deer, without the grant or licence of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, her heirs, successors, or progenitors." At the date of this statute Charlcote, it is said, was not a deer-park; was not an enclosed ground royally licensed. It appears to us that Malone puts the case against the tradition too strongly when he maintains that Charlcote was not a licensed park in 1562; and that, therefore, its venison continued to be unprotected till the statute of the 3rd of James. The Act of Elizabeth clearly contemplates any "several ground" "closed with wall, pale, or hedge, and used for the keeping of deer;" and as Sir Thomas Lucy built the mansion at Charlcote in 1558, it may reasonably be supposed that at the date of the statute the domain of Charlcote was closed with wall, pale, or hedge. The Lucys, however, whatever was the state of

the law as to their park, had a proprietorship in deer, for the successor of the Sir Thomas of the ballad sent a present of a buck to the Lord Keeper Egerton in 1602.

The deer-stealing tradition has shifted its locality as it has advanced in age. Charlcote, according to Mr. Samuel Ireland, was not the place of Shakspere's unlucky adventures. The Park of Fulbrooke, he says, was the property of Sir Thomas Lucy; and he gives us a drawing of an old house where the young offender was conveyed after his detection. Upon the Ordnance Map of our own day is the Deer

[Deer Barn, Fulbrooke.]

Barn, where, according to the same tradition, the venison was concealed. The engraving here given is founded upon a representation of the Deer Barn, "drawn by W. Jackson, 1798." I found it amongst some papers belonging to Mr. Waldron, that came into my possession, and I presented it to the author of a tract, published in 1862, entitled "Shakespeare no Deer-Stealer." The rude drawing is now in the Museum at Stratford.

The author of this tract, Mr. C. Holte Bracebridge, cannot be named by ourselves, nor, indeed, by any of his contemporaries, without a feeling of deep respect. His generous exertions to alleviate the miseries accompanying the war in the Crimea, originated in the same high principle as those of Florence Nightingale. But he must excuse us if we hesitate in our belief that the shifting of the scene of the deer-stealing from Charlcote to Fulbrooke adds much additional value to the credibility of the tradition. The argument of Mr. Bracebridge is in substance as follows:—

"From 1553 to 1592, Fulbrooke Park was held *in capite* of the Crown by Sir Francis Englefield. From 1558 to the time of his death, abroad, in 1592, Sir Francis had been attainted, and his property sequestered, although the proceeds were not appropriated by the Queen. It follows, then, that neither Sir Thomas Lucy nor his family had a proprietary right in Fulbrooke until the last years of Shakspere's life, when the estate, having been re-granted to the mother of the former attainted owner, it had been purchased from his nephew. But as Lucy's park ran along the bank of the Avon for nearly a mile, and for about the same distance Fulbrooke occupied the opposite bank; as the river was shallow and had a regular ford at Hampton Lucy, situate at one angle of Charlcote Park, the deer of

Fulbrooke and the deer of Charlcote were only kept separate by the fence on either side, that of the banished man being probably broken down. It is clear, holds Mr. Bracebridge, that if Shakspere had broken into Charlcote, and had there taken a buck or a doe, he would have been liable to the penalties of the 5th of Elizabeth; and that Sir Thomas Lucy would not have abstained from taking the satisfaction of the law, "for an offence, looked upon at that period, by the gentry at least, very much as housebreaking is with us." Because, therefore, Sir Thomas Lucy was a gentleman of ancient lineage, as his ancestor once held Fulbrooke Park of the Crown; as Englefield was abroad as a proscript, "he, Lucy, no doubt, hunted there." We state the argument of Mr. Bracebridge, from these facts, in his own words:—"In this state of things, Shakspeare would treat very lightly the warnings of the Charlcote keepers, knowing as a young lawyer that he had as good a right as Sir Thomas to sport over Fulbrooke, insomuch as there was no legal park there." If Mr. Bracebridge's arguments may be admitted to prove that William Shakspere, in the eye of the law, was not a deer-stealer; if he himself knew that he had as good a right to take a deer in Fulbrooke as Sir Thomas Lucy himself, what becomes of the tradition, first reduced to shape by Rowe, that he was prosecuted by Sir Thomas Lucy, somewhat too severely as he thought; that in order to revenge the ill-usage he made a ballad upon the knight; and that this production was so very bitter that he was obliged to leave his business and family, and shelter himself in London? The elaborate and ingenious argument of the author of "Shakespeare no Deer-Stealer," offers the best support to our opinion, thus noticed by him:—"Mr. Knight, after reviewing the evidence as to the tradition, considers it unworthy of belief." All the accessories of the story confirm us in this opinion. Under the law, as it existed from Henry VIII. to James I., our unhappy poet could not be held to have stolen rabbits, however fond he might be of hunting them; and certainly it would have been legally unsafe for Sir Thomas Lucy to have whipped him for such a disposition. Pheasants and partridges were free for men of all condition to shoot with gun or cross-bow, or capture with hawk. There was no restriction against taking hares except a statute of Henry VIII., which, for the protection of hunting, forbade tracking them in the snow. With this general right of sport—whatever might have been the opinion of the gentry that the taking of a deer was as grievous an offence as the breaking into a house—it is clear that, with those of Shakspere's own rank, there was no disgrace attached to the punishment of an offender legally convicted. All the writers of the Elizabethan period speak of killing a deer with a sort of jovial sympathy, worthy the descendants of Robin Hood. "I 'll have a buck till I die, I'll slay a doe while I live," is the maxim of the Host in 'The Merry Devil of Edmonton;' and even Sir John, the priest, reproves him not: he joins in the fun. With this loose state of public opinion, then, upon the subject of venison, is it likely that Sir Thomas Lucy, with the law on his side, would have pursued for such an offence the eldest son of an alderman of Stratford with any extraordinary severity? If the law were not on his side, Sir Thomas Lucy would only have made himself ridiculous amongst his neighbours by threatening to make a Star Chamber matter of it. The knight was nearly the most important person residing in the immediate neighbourhood of Stratford. In 1578 he had been High Sheriff. At the period when the deer-stealing may be supposed to have taken place he was seeking to be

member for the county of Warwick, for which he was returned in 1584. He was in the habit of friendly intercourse with the residents of Stratford, for in 1583 he was chosen as an arbitrator in a matter of dispute by Hamnet Sadler, the friend of John Shakspere and of his son. All these considerations tend, we think, to show that the improbable deer-stealing tradition is based, like many other stories connected with Shakspere, on that vulgar love of the marvellous which is not satisfied with the wonder which a being eminently endowed himself presents, without seeking a contrast of profligacy, or meanness, or ignorance in his early condition, amongst the tales of a rude generation who came after him, and, hearing of his fame, endeavoured to bring him as near as might be to themselves.

[Charlcote House. From Avenue.]

Charlcote, then, shall not, at least by us, be surrounded by unpleasant associations in connexion with the name of Shakspere. It is, perhaps, the most interesting locality connected with that name; for in its great features it is essentially unchanged. There stands, with slight alteration, and those in good taste, the old mansion as it was reared in the days of Elizabeth. A broad avenue leads to its fine gateway, which opens into the court and the principal entrance. We would desire to people that hall with kindly inmates; to imagine the fine old knight, perhaps a little too puritanical, indeed, in his latter days, living there in peace and happiness with his family; merry as he ought to have been with his first wife, Jocosa (whose English name, Joyce, soundeth not quite so pleasant), and whose epitaph, by her husband, is honourable alike to the deceased and to the survivor.* We can picture him planting the second

[Charlcote House. From the Avon.]

avenue, which leads obliquely across the park from the great gateway to the porch of the parish-church. It is an avenue too narrow for carriages, if carriages then had been common; and the knight and his lady walk in stately guise along that grassy pathway, as the Sunday bells summon them to meet their humble neighbours in a place where all are equal. Charlcote is full of rich woodland scenery. The lime-tree avenue, may, perhaps, be of a later date than the age of Elizabeth; and one elm has evidently succeeded another from century to century. But there are old gnarled oaks and beeches dotted about the park. Its little knolls and valleys are the same as they were two centuries ago. The same Avon flows beneath the gentle elevation on which the house stands, sparkling in the sunshine as brightly as when that house was first built. There may we still lie

* "All the time of her life a true and faithful servant of her good God; never detected of any crime or vice; in religion, most sound; in love to her husband, most faithful and true; in friendship, most constant; to what in trust was committed to her, most secret: in wisdom, excelling; in governing her house, and bringing up of youth in the fear of God, that did converse with her, most rare and singular. A great maintainer of hospitality; greatly esteemed of her betters; misliked of none unless of the envious. When all is spoken that can be said, a woman so furnished and garnished with virtue as not to be bettered, and hardly to be equalled of any. As she lived most virtuously, so she died most godly.

"Set down by him that best did know what hath been written to be true, Thomas Lucy."

"Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along his wood,"

and doubt not that there was the place to which

"A poor sequester'd stag,
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish." *

There may we still see

"A careless herd,
Full of the pasture,"

leaping gaily along, or crossing the river at their own will in search of fresh fields and low branches whereon to browse. We must associate Charlcote with happy circumstances. Let us make it the scene of a troth-plight.

[House in Charlcote Village.]

The village of Charlcote is now one of the prettiest of objects. Whatever is new about it—and most of the cottages are new—looks like a restoration of what was old. The same character prevails in the neighbouring village of Hampton Lucy; and it may not be too much to assume that the memory of him who walked in these pleasant places in his younger days, long before the sound of his greatness had gone forth to the ends of the earth, has led to the desire to preserve here something of the architectural character of the age in which he lived. There are a few old houses still left in Charlcote; but the more im-

* As You Like It, Act II., Scene I.

portant have probably been swept away. In one such house, then, about a year we will say before William Shakspere's own marriage, we may picture a small party assembled to be present at a solemn rite. There can be little doubt that the ancient ceremony of betrothing had not fallen into disuse at that period. Shakspere himself, who always, upon his great principle of presenting his audiences with matters familiar to them, introduces the manners of his own country in his own times, has several remarkable passages upon the subject of the troth-plight. In Measure for Measure we learn that the misery of the "poor dejected Mariana" was caused by a violation of the troth-plight:—

> "*Duke.* She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Frederick was wracked at sea, having in that perished vessel the dowry of his sister. But mark, how heavily this befel to the poor gentlewoman: there she lost a noble and renowned brother, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him the portion and sinew of her fortune, her marriage-dowry; with both, her combinate husband, this well-seeming Angelo.
>
> *Isabella.* Can this be so? Did Angelo so leave her?
>
> *Duke.* Left her in tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort; swallowed his vows whole, pretending, in her, discoveries of dishonour; in few, bestowed her on her own lamentation, which she yet wears for his sake; and he, a marble to her tears, is washed with them, but relents not."

Angelo and Mariana were bound then "by oath;" the nuptial was appointed; there was a prescribed time between the contract and the performance of the solemnity of the Church. But, the lady having lost her dowry, the contract was violated by her "combinate" or affianced husband. The oath which Angelo violated was taken before witnesses; was probably tendered by a minister of the Church. In Twelfth Night we have a minute description of such a ceremonial. When Olivia is hastily espoused to Sebastian, she says,—

> "Now go with me, and with this holy man,
> Into the chantry by: there, before him,
> And underneath that consecrated roof,
> Plight me the full assurance of your faith;
> That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
> May live at peace: He shall conceal it
> Whiles you are willing it shall come to note,
> What time we will our celebration keep
> According to my birth."

This was a private ceremony before a single witness, who would conceal it till the proper period of the public ceremonial. Olivia, fancying she has thus espoused the page, repeatedly calls him "husband;" and, being rejected, she summons the priest to declare

> "What thou dost know
> Hath newly pass'd between this youth and me."

The priest answers, —

"A contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirm'd by mutual joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strengthen'd by interchangement of your rings;
And all the ceremony of this compact
Seal'd in my function, by my testimony:
Since when, my watch has told me, toward my grave
I have travell'd but two hours."

But from another passage in Shakspere, it is evident that the troth-plight was exchanged without the presence of a priest, but that witnesses were essential to the ceremony.* The scene in the Winter's Tale where this occurs is altogether so perfect a picture of rustic life, that we may fairly assume that Shakspere had in view the scenes with which his own youth was familiar, where there was mirth without grossness, and simplicity without ignorance:—

"*Flo.* O, hear me breathe my life
Before this ancient sir, who, it should seem,
Hath sometime lov'd: *I take thy hand;* this hand,
As soft as dove's down, and as white as it;
Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow,
That 's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er.
Pol. What follows this?—
How prettily the young swain seems to wash
The hand was fair before!—I have put you out:—
But to your protestation; let me hear
What you profess.
Flo. Do, and *be witness to 't.*
Pol. And this *my neighbour too?*
Flo. And he, and more
Than he, and men; the earth, the heavens, and all:
That, were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,
Thereof most worthy; were I the fairest youth
That ever made eye swerve; had force, and knowledge,
More than was ever man's, I would not prize them,
Without her love: for her, employ them all;
Commend them, and condemn them, to her service,
Or to their own perdition.
Pol. Fairly offer'd.
Cam. This shows a sound affection.
Shep. But, my daughter,
Say you the like to him?
Per. I cannot speak
So well, nothing so well; no, nor mean better:
By the pattern of mine own thoughts I cut out
The purity of his.
Shep. *Take hands, a bargain;*—
And, friends unknown, *you shall bear witness to 't:*

---

* Holinshed states that at a synod held at Westminster, in the reign of Henry I., it was decreed "that contracts made between man and woman, without witnesses, concerning marriage, should be void if either of them denied it."

I give my daughter to him, and will make
Her portion equal his.
Flo. O, that must be
I' the virtue of your daughter: one being dead,
I shall have more than you can dream of yet;
Enough then for your wonder : But, come on,
Contract us 'fore these witnesses.
Shep. *Come, your hand;*
And, daughter, yours."

To the argument of Polixenes that the father of Florizel ought to know of his proceeding, the young man answers,—

"*Flo.* Come, come, he must not :—
Mark our contract."

And then the father, discovering himself, exclaims,—

"Mark your *divorce*, young sir."

Here, then, in the publicity of a village festival, the hand of the loved one is solemnly taken by her "servant;" he breathes his life before the ancient stranger who is accidentally present. The stranger is called to be witness to the protestation; and so is the neighbour who has come with him. The maiden is called upon by her father to speak, and then the old man adds,—

"Take hands, a bargain."

The friends are to bear witness to it :—

"I give my daughter to him, and will make
Her portion equal his."

The impatient lover then again exclaims,—

"Contract us 'fore these witnesses."

The shepherd takes the hands of the youth and the maiden. Again the lover exclaims,—

"Mark our contract."

The ceremony is left incomplete, for the princely father discovers himself with,—

"Mark your divorce, young sir."

We have thus shown, by implication, that in the time of Shakspere betrothment was not an obsolete rite. Previous to the Reformation it was in all probability that civil contract derived from the Roman law, which was confirmed indeed by the sacrament of marriage, but which usually preceded it for a definite period,—some say forty days,—having perhaps too frequently the effect of the marriage of the Church as regarded the unrestrained intercourse of those so espoused. In a work published in 1543, 'The Christian State of Matrimony,' we find this passage: "Yet in this thing also must I warn every rea-

sonable and honest person to beware that in the contracting of marriage they dissemble not, nor set forth any lie. Every man likewise must esteem the person to whom he is handfasted none otherwise than for his own spouse; though as yet it be not done in the church, nor in the street. After the handfasting and making of the contract the church-going and wedding should not be deferred too long." The author then goes on to rebuke a custom, "that at the handfasting there is made a great feast and superfluous banquet;" and he adds words which imply that the Epithalamium was at this feast sung, without a doubt of its propriety, "certain weeks afore they go to the church," where

> "All sanctimonious ceremonies may
> With full and holy rite be minister'd."

The passage in The Tempest from which we quote these lines has been held to show that Shakspere denounced, with peculiar solemnity, that impatience which waited not for "all sanctimonious ceremonies."* But it must be remembered that the solitary position of Ferdinand and Miranda prevented even the solemnity of a betrothment; there could be no witnesses of the public contract; it would be of the nature of those privy contracts which the ministers of religion, early in the reign of Elizabeth, were commanded to exhort young people to abstain from. The proper exercise of that authority during half a century had not only repressed these privy contracts, but had confined the ancient practice of espousals, with their almost inevitable freedoms, to persons in the lower ranks of life, who might be somewhat indifferent to opinion. A learned writer on the Common Prayer, Sparrow, holds that the Marriage Service of the Church of England was both a betrothment and a marriage. It united the two forms. At the commencement of the service the man says, "I plight thee my troth;" and the woman, "I give thee my troth." This form approaches as nearly as possible to that of a civil contract; but then comes the religious sanction to the obligation,—the sacrament of matrimony. In the form of espousals so minutely recited by the priest in Twelfth Night, he is only present to seal the compact by his "testimony." The marriage customs of Shakspere's youth and the opinions regarding them might be very different from the practice and opinions of thirty years later, when he wrote The Tempest. But in no case does he attempt to show, even through his lovers themselves, that the public troth-plight was other than a preliminary to a more solemn and binding ceremonial, however it might approach to the character of a marriage. It is remarkable that Webster, on the contrary, who was one of Shakspere's later contemporaries, has made the heroine of one of his noblest tragedies, 'The Duchess of Malfi,' in the warmth of her affection for her steward, exclaim—

> "I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber
> *Per verba præsenti* is absolute marriage."

This is an allusion to the distinctions of the canon law between betrothing and marrying—the betrothment being espousals with the *verba de futuro;* the mar-

* Life of Shakspeare, by Mr. de Quincey, in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

riage, espousals with the *verba de præsenti*. The Duchess of Malfi had misinterpreted the lawyers when she believed that a secret "contract in a chamber" was "absolute marriage," whether the engagement was for the present or the future.

Such a ceremonial, then, may have taken place in the presence of the young Shakspere, as he has himself described with inimitable beauty in the contract of his Florizel and Perdita. But under the happy roof at Charlcote there is no forbidding father; there is no inequality of rank in the parties contracted. They are near neighbours; a walk from Hampton Lucy through the grounds of Charlcote House brings the lover to the door of his mistress. And now, the contract performed, they merrily go forth into those grounds, to sit, with happiness too deep for utterance, under the broad beech which shades them from the morning sun; or they walk, not unwelcome visitors, upon the terrace of the new pleasure-garden which the good knight has constructed for the special solace of his lady. The relations between one in the social position of Sir Thomas Lucy and his humbler neighbours could not have been otherwise than kindly ones. The epitaph in which he speaks of his wife as "a great maintainer of hospitality" is tolerable evidence of his own disposition. Hospitality, in those days, consisted not alone in giving mighty entertainments to the rich and noble, but it included the cherishing of the poor, and the welcome of tenants and dependents. The Squire's Hall was not, like the Baron's Castle, filled with a crowd of prodigal retainers, who devoured his substance, and kept him as a stranger amongst those who naturally looked up to him for protection. Yet was the Squire a man of great worship and authority. He was a Justice of the Peace; the terror of all depredators; the first to be appealed to in all matters of village litigation. "The halls of the justice of peace were dreadful to behold; the screen was garnished with corslets, and helmets gaping with open mouths, with coats of mail, lances, pikes, halberds.

[Charlcote House, from the Garden.]

brown bills, bucklers."* The Justice had these weapons ready to arm his followers upon any sudden emergency; but, proud of his ancestry, his fighting-gear was not altogether modern. The "old worshipful gentleman who had a great estate" is described—

> "With an old hall, hung about with pikes, guns, and bows,
> With old swords, and bucklers, that had borne many shrewd blows."†

There was the broad oak-table in the hall, and the arm-chair large enough for a throne. The shovel-board was once there; but Sir Thomas, although he would play a quiet game with the chaplain at tric-trac, thought the shovel-board an evil example, and it was removed. Upon ordinary occasions the Justice sat in his library, a large oaken room with a few cumbrous books, of which the only novelty was the last collection of the Statutes. The book upon which the knight bestowed much of his attention was the famous book of John Fox, 'Acts and Monuments of these latter and perillous Dayes, touching Matters of the Church, wherein are comprehended and described the great Persecutions, and horrible Troubles, that have been wrought and practised by the Romishe Prelates.' This book was next to his Bible. He hated Popery, as he was bound to do according to law; and he somewhat dreaded the inroads of Popery in the shape of Church ceremonials. He was not quite clear that the good man to whom he had presented the living of Charlcote was perfectly right in maintaining the honour and propriety of the surplice; but he did not altogether think that it was the "mark of abomination."‡ He reprobated the persecution of certain ministers "for omitting small portions or some ceremony prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer."§ Those ministers were of the new opinions which men began to call puritanical.

The good knight's visits to Stratford may be occasionally traced in the Chamberlain's accounts, especially upon solemn occasions, when he went thither with "my Lady and Mr. Sheriff," and left behind him such pleasant memorials as "paid at the Swan for a quart of sack and a quartern of sugar, burned for Sir Thomas Lucy."‖ The "sack and sugar" would, we think, indispose him to go along with the violent denouncers of old festivals; and those who deprecated hunting and hawking were in his mind little better than fools. He had his falconer and his huntsman; and never was he happier than when he rode out of his gates with his hounds about him, and graciously saluted the yeomen who rode with him to find a hare in Fulbrooke. If, then, on the day of the troth-plight, Sir Thomas met the merry party from the village, he would assuredly have his blandest smiles in store for them; and as the affianced made their best bow and curtsey he would point merrily to the favour in the hat, the little folded handkerchief, with its delicate gold lace and its tassel in each corner.¶

* Aubrey. † The Old and Young Courtier. ‡ See Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' book v.

§ When in Parliament, in 1584, Sir Thomas Lucy presented a petition against the interference of ecclesiastical courts in such matters, wherein these words are used.

‖ Chamberlain's Accounts.—Halliwell, p. 101.

¶ "And it was then the custom for maids, and gentlewomen, to give their favourites, as tokens of their love, little handkerchiefs of about three or four inches square, wrought round about, and with a button, or a tassel at each corner, and a little in the middle, with silk or thread. The best edged with a little small gold lace, or twist, which being folded up in four cross folds, so as the middle might be seen, gentlemen and others did usually wear them in their hats, as favours of their loves and mistresses."— Howes's Continuation of Stow, p. 1039.

There is an early and a frugal dinner in the yeoman's house at Charlcote. Gervase Markham, in his excellent 'English Housewife,' describes "a humble feast or an ordinary proportion which any good man may keep in his family for the entertainment of his true and worthy friend." We doubt if so luxurious a provision was made in our yeoman's house; for Markham's "humble feast" consisted of three courses, the first of which comprised sixteen "dishes of meat that are of substance." Harrison, writing about forty years earlier, makes the yeoman contented with somewhat less abundance: "If they happen to stumble upon a piece of venison, and a cup of wine or very strong beer or ale (which latter they commonly provide against their appointed days), they think their cheer so great, and themselves to have fared so well, as the Lord Mayor of London."* But, whatever was the plainness or the delicacy of their dishes, there is no doubt of the hearty welcome which awaited all those who had claims to hospitality: "If the friends of the wealthier sort come to their houses from far, they are commonly so welcome till they depart as upon the first day of their coming."† Again: "Both the artificer and the husbandman are sufficiently liberal and very friendly at their tables; and when they meet they are so merry without malice, and plain without inward Italian or French craft or subtility, that it would do a man good to be in company among them."‡

Shakspere has himself painted, in one of his early days, the friendly intercourse between the yeomen and their better educated neighbours. To the table where even Goodman Dull was welcome, the schoolmaster gives an invitation to the parson: "I do dine to-day at the father's of a certain pupil of mine; where if, before repast, it shall please you to gratify the table with a grace, I will, on my privilege I have with the parents of the aforesaid child or pupil, undertake your *ben venuto*."§ And it was at this table that the schoolmaster won for himself this great praise: "Your reasons at dinner have been sharp and sententious, pleasant without scurrility, witty without affection, audacious without impudence, learned without opinion, and strange without heresy."‖ England was at that day not cursed with class and coterie society. The distinctions of rank were sufficiently well defined to enable men to mix freely, as long as they conducted themselves decorously. The barriers of modern society belong to an age of pretension.

The early dinner at Charlcote finished, the young visitors from Stratford take a circuitous road home over the Fulbrooke hills. The shooting season is approaching, and they have to breathe their dogs. But after they have crossed Black Hill they hear a loud shouting; and they know that the *hurlers* are abroad. Snitterfield is matched against Alveston; and a crowd of players from each parish have, with vast exertion, been driving their ball "over hills, dales, hedges, ditches,—yea, and thorough bushes, briars, mires, plashes, and rivers."¶ The cottage at the entrance of Fulbrooke is the goal. The Stratford youths must see the game played out, and curfew has rung before they reach home.

* Description of England, 1586, p. 170 † Ibid., p. 168. ‡ Ibid.
§ Love's Labour's Lost, Act iv., Scene ii. ‖ Ibid., Act v., Scene i
¶ Carew's 'Survey of Cornwall."

[Fulbrooke. Hurling.]

A few weeks roll on, and the bells of Hampton Lucy are ringing for a wedding. The out-door ceremonials are not quite so rude as those which Ben Jonson has delineated; but they are founded on the same primitive customs. There are "ribands, rosemary, and bay for the bridemen;" and some one of the rustics may exclaim—

> "Look! an the wenches ha' not found 'un out,
> And do parzent 'un with a van of rosemary,
> And bays, to vill a bow-pot, trim the head
> Of my best vore-horse! we shall all ha' bride laces,
> Or points, I zee." *

Like the father in Jonson's play, the happy yeoman of Charlcote might say to his dame—

> "You 'd have your daughters and maids
> Dance o'er the fields like fays to church:"

but he will not add—

> "I 'll have no roundels."

He will not be reproached that he resolved

* Tale of a Tub, Act I., Scene II.

"To let no music go afore his child
To church, to cheer her heart up."*

On the other hand, there are no court ceremonials here to be seen,

"As running at the ring, plays, masks, and tilting." †

There would be the bride-cup and the wheaten garlands; the bride led by fair-haired boys, and the bridegroom following with his chosen neighbours:—

'Glide by the banks of virgins then, and pass
The showers of roses, lucky four-leav'd grass;
The while the cloud of younglings sing,
And drown ye with a flow'ry spring;
While some repeat
Your praise, and bless you, sprinkling you with wheat,
While that others do divine
'Blest is the bride on whom the sun doth shine.'" ‡

The procession enters the body of the church; for, after the Reformation, the knot was no longer tied, as, at the five weddings of the Wife of Bath, at "church-door." The blessing is pronounced, the bride-cup is called for: the accustomed kiss is given to the bride. But neither custom is performed after the fashion of Petrucio:—

"He calls for wine:—'A health,' quoth he; as if
He had been aboard, carousing to his mates
After a storm:—quaff'd off the muscadel,
And threw the sops all in the sexton's face;
Having no other reason,—
But that his beard grew thin and hungerly,
And seem'd to ask him sops as he was drinking.
This done, he took the bride about the neck,
And kiss'd her lips with such a clamorous smack,
That, at the parting, all the church did echo." §

They drink out of the bride-cup with as much earnestness (however less the formality) as the great folks at the marriage of the Elector Palatine to the daughter of James I.:—"In conclusion, a joy pronounced by the King and Queen, and seconded with congratulation of the lords there present, which crowned with draughts of Ippocras out of a great golden bowl, as an health to the prosperity of the marriage, began by the Prince Palatine, and answered by the Princess."‖

We will not think that "when they come home from church then beginneth

* Tale of a Tub, Act II., Scene I.
† A New Way to pay Old Debts, Act IV., Scene III. ‡ Herrick's 'Hesperides.'
§ Taming of the Shrew, Act III., Scene II.
‖ Quoted in Reed's Shakspeare, from Finet's 'Philoxenis.'

excess of eating and drinking,—and as much is wasted in one day as were sufficient for the two new-married folks half a year to live upon." * The *dance* follows the banquet :—

"Hark, hark, I hear the minstrels play." †

* Christian State of Matrimony. † Taming of the Shrew, Act III., Scene II.

[Hampton Lucy. The Old Church.]

[Daisy Hill.]

III.—Field Sports.

There is a book with which William Shakspere would unquestionably be familiar, the delightful 'Scholemaster' of Roger Ascham, first printed in 1570, which would sufficiently encourage him, if encouragement were wanting, in the common pursuit of serious study and manly exercises. "I do not mean," says this fine genial old scholar, "by all this my talk, that young gentlemen should always be poring on a book, and, by using good studies, should lose honest pleasure and haunt no good pastime; I mean nothing less: for it is well known that I both like and love, and have always and do yet still use, all exercises and pastimes that be fit for my nature and ability. And beside natural disposition, in judgment also, I was never either stoic in doctrine, or Anabaptist in religion, to mislike a merry, pleasant, and playful nature, if no outrage be committed against law, measure, and good order. . . . . Therefore to ride comely; to run fair at the tilt or ring; to play at all weapons; to shoot fair in bow or surely in gun; to vault lustily; to run; to leap; to wrestle; to swim; to dance comely; to sing, and play of instruments cunningly; to hawk; to hunt; to play at tennis; and all pastimes generally which be joined with labour, used in open place, and in the daylight, containing either some fit exercise for war, or some pleasant pastime for peace, be not only comely and decent, but also very necessary for a courtly gentleman to use."

To "ride comely," to "shoot fairly in bow, or surely in gun," "to hawk, to hunt," were pastimes in which William Shakspere would heartily engage. His plays abound with the most exact descriptions of matters connected with field sports. In these exercises, "in open place and in the daylight," would he meet his neighbours; and we may assume that those social qualities which won for him the love of the wisest and the wittiest in his mature years, would be prominent in the frankness and fearlessness of youth. Learned men had despised hunting and hawking—had railed against these sports. Surely Sir Thomas More, he would think, never had hawk on fist, or chased the destructive vermin whose furs he wore, when he wrote, "What delight can there be, and not rather displeasure, in hearing the barking and howling of dogs?"* Erasmus, too, was a secluded scholar. Ascham appreciated these things, because he liked, and loved, and used them. With his "stone-bow" in hand would the boy go forth in search of quail or partridge. It was a difficult weapon—a random shot might hit a man "in the eye,"† but it was not so easy when the small bullet flew from the string to bring down the blackbird from the bush. There is abundant game in Fulbrooke. Ever since the attainder of John Dudley it had been disparked; granted by the Crown to a favourite, and again seized upon. A lovely woodland scene was this in the days when Elizabeth took into her own hands the property which her sister had granted to Sir Henry Englefield, now a proscribed wanderer. The boy-sportsman is on Daisy Hill with his "birding-bow;" but the birds are for a while unheeded. He stops to gaze upon that glorious view of Warwick which here is unfolded. There, bright in the sunshine, at the distance of four or five miles, are the noble towers of the Beauchamps; and there is the lofty church beneath whose roof their pride and their ambition lie low. Behind him is his own Stratford, with its humbler spire. All around is laund and bush,—a spot which might have furnished the scene of the Keepers in Henry VI.:—

> "1 *Keep.* Under this thick-grown brake we'll shroud ourselves;
> For through this laund anon the deer will come;
> And in this covert will we make our stand,
> Culling the principal of all the deer.
>
> 2 *Keep.* I'll stay above the hill, so both may shoot.
>
> 1 *Keep.* That cannot be; the noise of thy cross-bow
> Will scare the herd, and so my shoot is lost.
> Here stand we both, and aim we at the best;"—‡

a spot to which many a fair dame had been led by gallant forester, with bow bent, and "quarrel" fitted:—

> "*Prin.* Then, forester, my friend, where is the bush
> That we must stand and play the murtherer in?
>
> *For.* Here by, upon the edge of yonder coppice;
> A stand, where you may make the fairest shoot." §

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* Utopia, book ii. chap. 7.

† "O, for a stone-bow! to hit him in the eye."—Twelfth Night.

‡ Henry VI., Part III., Act III., Scene I. § Love's Labour's Lost, Act IV., Scene I.

With the timid deer even the cross-bow scares the herd with its noise. But it was retained in "birding" long after the general use of fire-arms, that the covey might not be scattered. Its silent power of destruction was its principal merit.

But as boyhood is thrown off there are nobler pastimes for William Shakspere than those of gun and cross-bow. Like Gaston de Foix "he loved hounds, of all beasts, winter and summer."* He was skilled in the qualities of hounds: he delighted in those of the noblest breed,—

> "So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung
> With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
> Crook-kneed and dew-lapp'd, like Thessalian bulls;
> Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,
> Each under each." †

The chase in his day was not a tremendous burst for an hour or two, whose breathless speed shuts out all sense of beauty in the sport. There was harmony in every sound of the ancient hunt—there was poetry in all its associations. Such lines as those which Hippolita utters were not the fancies of a cloistered student:—

> "I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
> When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
> With hounds of Sparta: never did I hear
> Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,
> The skies, the fountains, every region near
> Seem'd all one mutual cry: I never heard
> So musical a discord, such sweet thunder." ‡

The solemn huntings of princes and great lords, where large assemblies were convened to chase the deer in spaces enclosed by nets, but where the cook and the butler were as necessary as the hunter, were described in stately verse by George Gascoigne. "The noble art of Venerie" seems to have been an admirable excuse for ease and luxury "under the greenwood tree." But the open hunting with the country squire's beagles was a more stirring matter. By daybreak was the bugle sounded; and from the spacious offices of the Hall came forth the keepers, leading their slow-hounds for finding the game, and the foresters with their greyhounds in leash. Many footmen are there in attendance with their quarter-staffs and hangers. Slowly rides forth the master and his friends. Neighbours join them on their way to the wood. There is merriment in their progress, for, as they pass through the village, they stop before the door of the sluggard who ought to have been on foot, singing "Hunt's up to the day:"—§

> "The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
> Sing merrily we, the hunt is up;

---

* Lord Berners' 'Froissart,' book iii. chap. 26.

† Midsummer Night's Dream, Act iv., Scene i. ‡ Ibid.

§ Romeo and Juliet, Act iii., Scene v.

The birds they sing,
The deer they fling:
Hey nony, nony-no.
The hounds they cry,
The hunters they fly:
Hey troli lo, trololilo.
The hunt is up." *

It is a cheering and inspiriting tune — the *réveillée* — awakening like the "singing" of the lark, or the "lively din" of the cock. Sounds like these were heard, half a century after the youth of Shakspere, by the student whose poetry scarcely descended to the common things which surrounded him; for it was not the outgushing of the heart over all life and nature; it was the reflection of his own individuality, and the echo of books—beautiful indeed, but not all-comprehensive :—

"Oft list'ning how the hounds and horn
Cheerly arouse the slumb'ring morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill." †

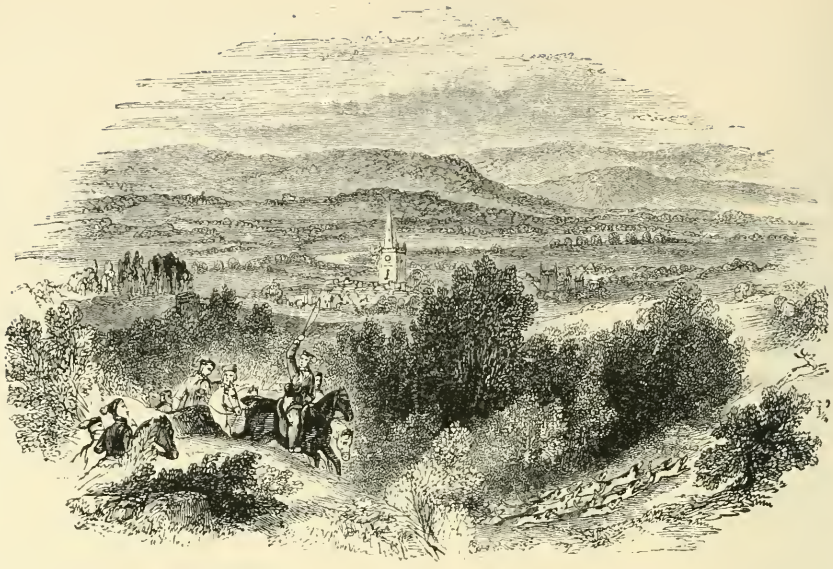
To the wood leads the chief huntsman. He has tracked the hart or doe to the covert on the previous night; and now the game is to be roused by man and dog. Some of the company may sing the fine old song, as old as the time of Henry VIII. :—

"Blow thy horn, hunter,
Blow thy horn on high.
In yonder wood there lieth a doe;
In faith she woll not die.
Then blow thy horn, hunter,
Then blow thy horn, hunter,
Then blow thy horn, jolly hunter." ‡

The hart is roused. The hounds have burst out in "musical confusion." Soho is cried. The greyhounds are unleashed. And now rush horsemen and footmen over hill—through dingle. A mile or two of sharp running, and he is again in cover. Again the keepers beat the thicket with their staves. He is again in the open field, crossing Ingon Hill. And so it is long before the *treble-mort* is sounded; and the great mystery of "wood-craft," the anatomy of the venison, is gone through with the nicest art, even to the cutting off a bone for the raven.§

It is in his first poem—"the first heir of my invention"—that the sportsman is most clearly to be identified with the youthful Shakspere. Who ever painted a hare-hunt with such united spirit and exactness? We see the cranks, and crosses, and doubles, of the poor wretch; the cunning with which he causes the

* Douce, 'Illustrations of Shakspeare,' vol. ii. p. 192. † Milton, 'L'Allegro.'
‡ The MS. of this fine song is in the British Museum. It has been published by Mr. Chappell.
§ Ben Jonson's 'Sad Shepherd,' Act I., Scene VI.



[Ingon Hill.]

hounds to mistake the smell; the listening upon a hill for his pursuers; the turning and returning of poor Wat. Who ever described a horse with such a complete mastery of all the points of excellence? In his plays, all the niceties of falconry are touched upon; and the varieties of hawk—"haggard," "tassel-gentle," "eyas musket,"—spoken of with a master's knowledge. Hawking was the universal passion of his age, especially for the wealthy. Coursing was for the yeomen—such as Master Page.* The love of all field-sports lasted half a century longer; and some of Shakspere's great dramatic successors have put out all their strength in their description. There are few things more spirited than the following passage from Massinger:—

"*Dur.* I must have you
To my country villa: rise before the sun,
Then make a breakfast of the morning dew,
Serv'd up by nature on some grassy hill.
Cald. You talk of nothing.
Dur. This ta'en as a preparative, to strengthen
Your queasy stomach, vault into your saddle;
With all this flesh I can do it without a stirrup:—
My hounds uncoupled, and my huntsmen ready,
You shall hear such music from their tunable mouths,
That you shall say the viol, harp, theorbo,
Ne'er made such ravishing harmony; from the groves

* Merry Wives of Windsor, Act I., Scene I.

And neighbouring woods with frequent iterations,
Enamour'd of the cry, a thousand echoes
Repeating it.

* * * * * *

Dur. In the afternoon,
For we will have variety of delights,
We 'll to the field again; no game shall rise
But we'll be ready for't: if a hare, my greyhounds
Shall make a course; for the pie or jay, a sparhawk
This from the fist; the crow so near pursued,
Shall be compell'd to seek protection under
Our horses' bellies; a hearn put from her siege,
And a pistol shot off in her breech, shall mount
So high, that, to your view, she 'll seem to soar
Above the middle region of the air:
A cast of haggard falcons, by me mann'd,
Eying the prey at first, appear as if
They did turn tail; but with their labouring wings
Getting above her, with a thought their pinions
Cleaving the purer element, make in,
And by turns bind with her; the frighted fowl,
Lying at her defence upon her back,
With her dreadful beak awhile defers her death,
But by degrees forced down, we part the fray,
And feast upon her.

Cald. This cannot be, I grant,
But pretty pastime.

Dur. Pretty pastime, nephew!
'Tis royal sport. Then, for an evening flight,
A tiercel gentle, which I call, my masters,
As he were sent a messenger to the moon,
In such a place flies, as he seems to say,
See me, or see me not! the partridge sprung,
He makes his stoop; but, wanting breath, is forced
To cancelier; then with such speed, as if
He carried lightning in his wings, he strikes
The tumbling bird, who even in death appears
Proud to be made his quarry." *

The passage in which Massinger thus describes what had been presented to his observation is one of the many examples of the rare power which the dramatists of Shakspere's age possessed,—the power of seeing nature with their own eyes. But we may almost venture to say that this power scarcely existed in dramatic poetry before Shakspere taught his contemporary poets that there was something better in art than the conventional images of books—the shadows of shadows. The wonderful superiority of Shakspere over all others, in stamping the minutest objects of creation, as well as the highest mysteries of the soul of man, with the impress of truth, must have been derived, in some degree, from his education, working with his genius. All his early experience must have been his education; and we therefore are not attempting mere fan-

* The Guardian, Act I., Scene The speakers are *Durazzo* and *Caldoro*.

ciful combinations of the individual with the circumstances of his social position, when we surround him with the scenes which belong to his locality, his time, and his condition of life.

[Snitterfield.]

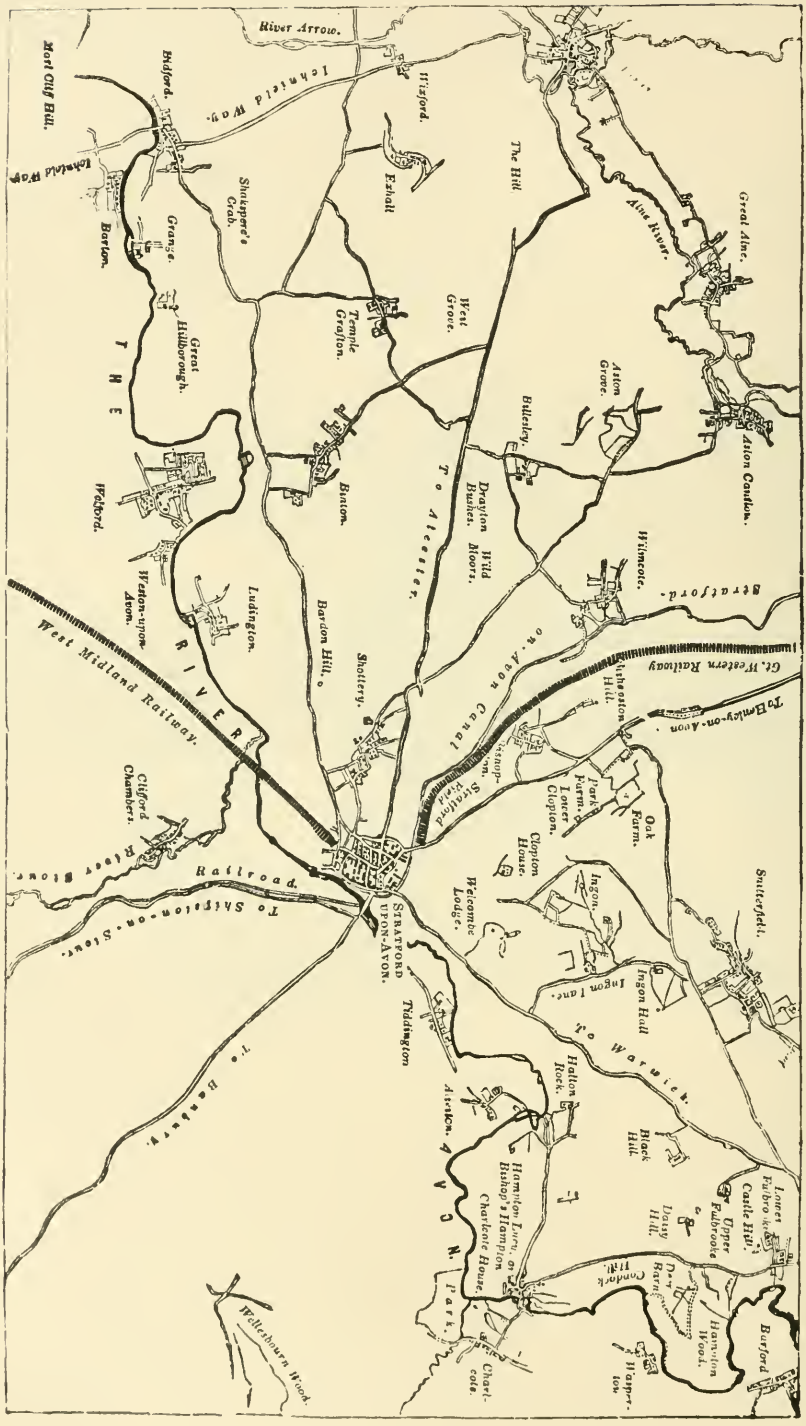
NOTE ON THE SHAKSPERIAN LOCALITIES.

We have endeavoured to render the local descriptions and allusions in this chapter, and in preceding passages, more intelligible, by subjoining a map of the neighbourhood of Stratford. In this neighbourhood there is little of that scenery which we call romantic; but the surpassing fertility, the undulating surfaces, the rich woodlands, the placid river, and the numerous and beautiful old churches, render it an interesting country to walk over, independent of its associations. Those associations impart to this neighbourhood an unequalled charm; and the outline map here given may probably assist the lover of Shakspere in a ramble through *his*

"Daily walks, and ancient neighbourhood."

The very beautiful sketches of Mr. Harvey, of which we can attest the fidelity, as far as regards their local accuracy, may also lend an interest to such a visit. The map has been constructed with reference to the insertion of places only which are either named in Shakspere's works, or with which he or his family were connected, or which have appeared to us demanding mention or allusion in his biography. The map is, of course, a map for the present day, but there are very few names inserted which are not found in Dugdale's Map of the hundreds which contain this neighbourhood. Many, of course, are omitted which are there found.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF STRATFORD.



[Hampton Lucy, from road near Alveston.]

CHAPTER XV.

SOLITARY HOURS.

The poet who has described a man of savage wildness, cherishing "unshaped, half-human thoughts" in his wanderings among vales and streams, green wood and hollow dell, has said that nature ne'er could find the way into his heart:—

> "A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."

These are lines at which some of the worldly-wise and clever have been wont to laugh; but they contain a deep and universal truth. Without some association, the most beautiful objects in nature have no charm; with association, the commonest acquire a value. The very humblest power of observation is

necessarily dependent upon some higher power of the mind. Those who observe differ from those who do not observe in the possession of acquired knowledge, or original reflection, which is to guide the observation. The observer who sees accurately, who knows what others have observed, and who applies this knowledge only to the humble purpose of adding a new flower or insect to his collection, we call a naturalist. But there are naturalists, worthy of the name, who, without bringing any very high powers of mind to their observation of nature, still show, not only by the minuteness and accuracy of their eye, but by their genial love and admiration of the works of the Creator, that with them nature has found the way into the heart. Such was White of Selborne. We delight to hear him describe the mouse's nest which he found suspended in the head of a thistle; or how a gentleman had two milk-white rooks in one nest: we partake in his happiness when he writes of what was to him an event: "This morning I saw the golden-crowned wren whose crown glitters like burnished gold;" and we half suspect that the good old gentleman had the spirit of poetry in him when he says of the goat-sucker, "This bird is most punctual in beginning its song exactly at the close of day; so exactly that I have known it strike up more than once or twice just at the report of the Portsmouth evening gun." He wrote verses; but they are not so poetical as his prose. A naturalist endowed with higher powers of association has taught us how philosophy looks upon the common aspects of the outer world. Davy was a scientific observer. He shows us the reason of the familiar prognostications of the weather—the coppery sunset, the halo round the moon, the rainbow at night, the flight of the swallow. Even omens have a touch of science in them; and there is a philosophical difference in the luck of seeing one magpie or two. But there is an observer of nature who looks upon all animate and inanimate existence with a higher power of association even than these. It is the poetical naturalist. Of this rare class our Shakspere is decidedly the head. Let us endeavour to understand what his knowledge of external nature was, how it was applied, and how it was acquired.

Some one is reported to have said that he could affirm from the evidence of his 'Seasons' that Thomson was an early riser. Thomson, it is well known, duly slept till noon. Bearing in mind this practical rebuke of what is held to be internal evidence, we still shall not hesitate to affirm our strong conviction that the Shakspere of the country was an early riser. Thomson, professedly a descriptive poet, assuredly described many things that he never saw. He looked at nature very often with the eyes of others. To our mind his celebrated description of morning offers not the slightest proof that he ever saw the sun rise.* In this description we have the meek-eyed morn, the dappled east, brown night, young day, the dripping rock, the misty mountain: the hare limps from the field; the wild deer trip from the glade; music awakes in woodland hymns; the shepherd drives his flock from the fold; the sluggard sleeps:—

* Summer. Line 13 to 96.

"But yonder comes the powerful king of day,
Rejoicing in the east! The lessening cloud,
The kindling azure, and the mountain's brow,
Illum'd with fluid gold, his near approach
Betoken glad. Lo, now apparent all,
Aslant the dew-bright earth and colour'd air,
He looks in boundless majesty abroad,
And sheds the shining day, that burnish'd plays
On rocks, and hills, and towers, and wandering streams,
High-gleaming from afar."

This is conventional poetry, the reflection of books;—excellent of its kind, but still not the production of a poet-naturalist. Compare it with Chaucer:—

"The besy larke, the messager of day,
Saleweth in hire song the morwe gray;
And firy Phebus riseth up so bright,
That all the orient laugheth of the sight,
And with his stremes drieth in the greves
The silver dropes, hanging on the leves." *

The sun drying the dewdrops on the leaves is not a book image. The brilliancy, the freshness, are as true as they are beautiful. Of such stuff are the natural descriptions of Shakspere always made. He is as minute and accurate as White; he is more philosophical than Davy. The carrier in the inn-yard at Rochester exclaims, "An't be not four by the day, I'll be hanged: Charles' wain is over the new chimney."† Here is the very commonest remark of a common man; and yet the principle of ascertaining the time of the night by the position of a star in relation to a fixed object must have been the result of observation in him who dramatized the scene. The variation of the quarter in which the sun rises according to the time of the year may be a trite problem to scientific readers; but it must have been a familiar *fact* to him who, with marvellous art, threw in a dialogue upon the incident, to diversify and give repose to the pause in a scene of overwhelming interest:—

"*Decius.* Here lies the east: Doth not the day break here?
Casca. No.
Cinna. O, pardon, sir, it doth; and yon gray lines,
That fret the clouds, are messengers of day.
Casca. You shall confess that you are both deceiv'd.
Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises;
Which is a great way growing on the south,
Weighing the youthful season of the year.
Some two months hence, up higher toward the north
He first presents his fire; and the high east
Stands, as the Capitol, directly here." ‡

It was in his native fields that Shakspere had seen morning under every aspect;

* The Knight's Tale. Line 1493. † Henry IV., Part I., Act II., Scene I.
‡ Julius Cæsar, Act II., Scene I.

—now, 'in russet mantle clad;" now, opening her "golden gates." A mighty battle is compared to the morning's war:—

"When dying clouds contend with growing light."

Perhaps this might have been copied, or imagined; but the poet throws in reality, which leaves no doubt that it had been *seen*:—

"What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day, nor night." *

What but actual observation could have told the poet that the thin flakes of ice which he calls "flaws" are suddenly produced by the coldness of the morning just before sunrise? The fact abided in his mind till it shaped it itself into a comparison with the peculiarities in the character of his Prince Henry:—

"As humorous as winter, and as sudden
As flaws congealed in the spring of day."

He has painted his own Romeo, when under the influence of a fleeting first love, stealing "into the covert of the wood,"

"An hour before the worshipp'd sun
Peer'd forth the golden window of the east."†

A melancholy and joyous spirit would equally have tempted the young poet to court the solitudes that were around him. Whether his "affections" were to be "most busied when most alone·" ‡ or, objectless,

"Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy;" §

or intent upon a favourite book; or yielding to the imagination which "bodies forth the forms of things unknown,"—many of the vacant hours of the young man would be solitary hours in his own fields. Yet, whatever was the pervading train of thought, he would still be an observer. In the vast storehouse of his mind would all that he observed be laid up, not labelled and classified after the fashion of some poetical manufacturers, but to be called into use at a near or a distant day, by that wonderful power of assimilation which perceives all the subtile and delicate relations between the moral and the physical worlds, and thus raises the objects of sense into a companionship with the loftiest things that belong to the fancy and the reason. Who ever *painted* with such marvellous power—we use the word advisedly—the changing forms of an evening sky, "black vesper's pageants"?—

"Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;
A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air." ||

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* Henry VI., Part III., Act II. Scene V. + Romeo and Juliet, Act I., Scene I.
‡ Ibid. § As You Like It, Act IV., Scene III.
|| Antony and Cleopatra, Act IV., Scene XII.

This is noble painting, but it is something higher. When Antony goes on to compare *himself* to the cloud which "even with a thought the rack dislimns," we learn how the great poet uses his observation of nature. Not only do such magnificent objects as these receive an elevation from the poet's moral application of them, but the commonest things, even the vulgarest things, ludicrous but for their management, become in the highest degree poetical. Many a time in the low meadows of the Avon would Shakspere have seen the irritation of the herd under the torments of the gad-fly. The poet takes this common thing to describe an event which changed the destinies of the world :—

> "Yon ribald nag of Egypt,
> Whom leprosy o'ertake ! i' the midst o' the fight,—
> When vantage like a pair of twins appear'd,
> Both as the same, or rather ours the elder,—
> The *brize* upon her, like a cow in June,
> Hoists sails, and flies." *

When Hector is in the field,

> "The strawy Greeks, ripe for his edge.
> Fall down before him, like the mower's swath." †

Brutus, speculating upon the probable consequences of Cæsar becoming king, exclaims :—

> "It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
> And that craves wary walking." ‡

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* Antony and Cleopatra, Act III., Scene VIII.
† Troilus and Cressida, Act V., Scene V. ‡ Julius Cæsar, Act II., Scene I

[Meadows near Welford.]

The same object had been seen and described in an earlier play, without its grand association:—

"The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun." *

The snake seems a liege subject of the domain of poetry. Her enamel skin is a weed for a fairy;† the green and gilded snake wreathed around the sleeping man‡ is a picture. But what ordinary writer would not shrink from the poetical handling of a snail? It is the surpassing accuracy of the naturalist that has introduced the snail into one of the noblest passages of the poet, in juxtaposition with the Hesperides and Apollo's lute:—

"Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails." §

One of the grandest scenes of a tragedy of the mature poet is full of the most familiar images derived from an accurate observation of the natural world. The images seem to rise up spontaneously out of the minute recollections of a life spent in watching the movements of the lower creation. "A deed of dreadful note" is to be done before nightfall. The bat, the beetle, and the crow are the common, and therefore the most appropriate, instruments which are used to mark the approach of night. The simplest thing of life is thus raised into sublimity at a touch:—

"Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight;"

ere

"The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung night's yawning peal;"

the murder of Banquo is to be done. The very time is at hand:—

"Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood." ||

The naturalist has not only heard the "drowsy hums" of the beetle as he wandered in the evening twilight, but he has traced the insect to its hiding-place. The poet associates the fact with a great lesson,—to be content in obscure safety:—

"Often, to our comfort, shall we find
The sharded beetle in a safer hold
Than is the full-wing'd eagle." ¶

Let it not be forgotten that the young Shakspere had to make himself a naturalist. Books of accurate observation there were none to guide him; for the popular works of natural history, of which there were very few, were full of extravagant fables and vague descriptions. Mr. Douce has told us that Shakspere was extremely well acquainted with one of these works—'Batman uppon

* Titus Andronicus, Act II., Scene III.
† A Midsummer-Night's Dream, Act II., Scene II.
‡ As You Like It, Act IV., Scene III.
§ Love's Labour's Lost, Act IV., Scene I.
|| Macbeth, Act III., Scene II.
¶ Cymbeline, Act III., Scene III.

Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum, 1582;' and he has ascertained that the original price of this volume was eight shillings. But Shakspere did not go to Bartholomeus, or to Batman (who made large additions to the original work from Gesner), for his truths in natural history. Mr. Douce has cited many passages in his 'Illustrations,' in which he traces Shakspere to Bartholomeus. We have gone carefully through the volumes where these are scattered up and down, and we find a remarkable circumstance unnoticed by Mr. Douce, that these passages, with scarcely an exception, refer to the vulgar errors of natural history which Shakspere has transmuted into never-dying poetry. It is here that we find the origin of the toad which wears "a precious jewel in his head;"* of the phœnix of Arabia;† of the basilisk that kills the innocent gazer;‡ of the unlicked bear-whelp.§ But the truths of natural history which we constantly light upon in Shakspere were all essentially derived from his own observation. There is a remarkable instance in his discrimination between the popular belief and the scientific truth in his notice of the habits of the cuckoo. The Fool in Lear expresses the popular belief in a proverbial sentence:—

> "For *you trow*, nuncle,
> The hedge sparrow fed the cuckoo so long
> That it had its head bit off by its young."

Worcester in his address to Henry IV., expresses the scientific fact without the vulgar exaggeration,—a fact unnoticed till the time of Dr. Jenner by any writer but the naturalist William Shakspere:—

> "Being fed by us, you used us so
> As that ungentle gull the cuckoo's bird
> Useth the sparrow: did *oppress our nest;*
> Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk,
> That even our love durst not come near your sight." ‖

The noble description of the commonwealth of bees in Henry V. was suggested, in all probability, by a similar description in Lyly's 'Euphues.' But Shakspere's description not only displays the wonderful accuracy of his observation, in subservience to the poetical art, but the unerring discrimination of his philosophy. Lyly makes his bees exercise the reasoning faculty—*choose* a king, *call* a parliament, *consult* for laws, *elect* officers; Shakspere says "they *have* a king and officers;" and he refers their operations to "a rule in nature." The same accuracy that he brought to the observation of the workings of nature in the fields, he bestows upon the assistant labours of art in the garden. The fine dialogue between the old gardener at Langley and the servants, is full of technical information. The great principles of horticultural economy, pruning and weeding, are there as clearly displayed as in the most anti-poetical of treatises. We have the crab-tree slip grafted upon noble stock (the reverse of the gardener's practice) in one play:¶ in another we have the luxurious "scions put

* As You Like It, Act II., Scene I.
† Tempest, Act III., Scene II.
‡ Henry VI., Part II., Act III., Scene II.
§ Ibid., Part III., Act III., Scene II.
‖ See our Illustration of this passage, Henry IV., Part I., Act V., Scene I.
¶ Henry VI., Part II., Act III., Scene II.

in wild and savage stock."* A writer in a technical periodical work seriously maintains that Shakspere was a professional gardener.† This is better evidence of the poet's horticultural acquirements than Steevens's pert remark, "Shakspeare seems to have had little knowledge in gardening."‡ Shakspere's philosophy of the gardener's art is true of all art. It is the great Platonic belief which raises art into something much higher than a thing of mere imitation, showing the great informing spirit of the universe working through man, as through any other agency of his will:—

"*Per.* Sir, the year growing ancient,—
Nor yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter,—the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations, and streak'd gilly 'vors,
Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden 's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.
Pol. Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?
Per. For I have heard it said,
There is an art which, in their piedness, shares
With great creating nature.
Pol. Say, there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art,
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock;
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: This is an art
Which does mend nature,—change it rather: but
The art itself is nature." §

Perdita's flowers! who can mention them, and not think of the wonderful union of the accuracy of the naturalist with the loveliest images of the poet? It has been well remarked that in Milton's 'Lycidas' we have "among vernal flowers many of those which are the offspring of Midsummer;" but Shakspere distinguishes his groups, assorting those of the several seasons.‖ Perhaps in the whole compass of poetry there is no such perfect combination of elegance and truth as the passage in which Perdita bestows her gifts—parts of which are of such surpassing loveliness, that the sense aches at them:—

"O, Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou lett'st fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath." ¶

* Henry V., Act III., Scene v. † The Gardener's Chronicle, May 29, 1841.
‡ Note on As You Like It, Act III., Scene II. § Winter's Tale, Act IV., Scene III.
‖ Patterson's 'Natural History of the Insects mentioned in Shakspeare's Plays.'
¶ Winter's Tale, Act IV., Scene III.

Of all the objects of creation it is in flowers that Shakspere's genius appears most to revel and luxuriate; but the precision with which he seizes upon their characteristics distinguishes him from all other poets. A word is a description. The "pale primrose," the "azur'd harebell," are the flowers to be strewn upon Fidele's grave; but how is their beauty elevated when the one is compared to her face, and the other to her veins! Shakspere perhaps caught the sweetest image of his sweetest song from the lines of Chaucer which we have recently quoted; where we have the lark, and the fiery Phœbus drying the silver drops on the leaves. But it was impossible to have translated this fine passage, as Shakspere has done, without the minute observation of the naturalist working with the invention of the poet:—

> "Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
> And Phœbus 'gins arise,
> His steeds to water at those springs
> On *chalic'd flowers* that lies." *

The rosebud shrivels and dies, and the cause is disregarded by a common observer. The poetical naturalist points out "the bud bit by an envious worm."† Again, the microscope of the poet sees "the crimson drops i' the bottom of a cowslip," and the observation lies in the cells of his memory till it becomes a comparison of exquisite delicacy in reference to the "cinque-spotted" mark of the sleeping Imogen. But the eye which observes everything is not only an eye for beauty, as it looks upon the produce of the fields; it has the sense of utility as strong as that which exists in the calculations of the most anti-poetical. The mad Lear's garland is a catalogue of the husbandman's too luxuriant enemies:—

> "Crown'd with rank fumiter, and furrow weeds,
> With harlocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
> Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
> In our sustaining corn." ‡

Who could have conceived the noble picture in Henry V. of a country wasted by war, but one who from his youth upward had been familiar, even to the minutest practice, with all that is achieved by cultivation, and all that is lost by neglect;—who had seen the wild powers of nature held in subjection to the same producing power under the guidance of art;—who had himself assisted in this best conquest of man?—

> "Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart,
> Unpruned dies: her hedges even-pleach'd,
> Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair
> Put forth disorder'd twigs: her fallow leas
> The darnel, hemlock, and rank fumitory,
> Doth root upon; while that the coulter rusts,
> That should deracinate such savagery:
> The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth

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* Cymbeline, Act II., Scene III. † Romeo and Juliet, Act I., Scene I.
‡ King Lear, Act IV., Scene IV.

The freckled cowslip, burnet, and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness; and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,
Losing both beauty and utility." *

Even the technical words of agriculture find their place in his language of poetry:—

"Like to the summer's corn by tempest *lodg'd*." †

He goes into the woods of his own Arden, and he associates her oaks with the sublimest imagery; but still the oak loses nothing of its characteristics. "The thing of courage, as roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise,"

"When splitting winds
Make flexible the *knees* of knotted oaks."

Again:—

"Merciful Heaven!
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Splitt'st the *unwedgeable* and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle." §

Even the woodman's economy, who is careful not to exhaust the tree that furnishes him fuel, becomes an image to show, by contrast, the impolicy of excessive taxation:—

"Why, we take
From every tree, lop, bark, and part o' the timber;
And, though we leave it with a root, thus hack'd
The air will drink the sap." ‖

It is in these woods that he has studied the habits of the "joiner squirrel," who makes Mab's chariot out of an "empty hazel-nut."¶ Here the active boy was no doubt the "venturous fairy" that would seek the "squirrel's hoard, and fetch new nuts."** Here he has watched the stock-dove sitting upon her nest, and has stored the fact in his mind till it becomes one of the loveliest of poetical comparisons:—

"Anon as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets are disclos'd,
His silence will sit drooping." ‡‡

What book-fed poet could have chosen a homely incident of country life as the aptest illustration of an assembly suddenly scattered by their fears?—

"Russet-painted choughs, many in sort,
Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever themselves, and madly sweep the sky." ††

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* Henry V., Act v., Scene ii. † Henry VI., Part II., Act iii., Scene i.
‡ Troilus and Cressida, Act i., Scene iii. § Measure for Measure, Act ii., Scene ii.
‖ Henry VIII., Act i., Scene ii. ¶ Romeo and Juliet, Act i., Scene iv.
** A Midsummer-Night's Dream, Act iv., Scene i. †† Hamlet, Act v., Scene i.
‡‡ A Midsummer-Night's Dream, Act iii., Scene ii.

The poet tells us—and we believe him as much as if a Pliny or a Gesner had written it—that

> "The poor wren,
> The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
> Her young ones in her nest, against the owl." *

The boy has climbed to the kite's nest, and there perchance has found some of the gear that "maidens bleach;" the discovery becomes a saying for Autolycus:—"When the kite builds, look to lesser linen."† In all this practical part of Shakspere's education it is emphatically true that the boy "is father of the man."‡

Shakspere, in an early play, has described his native river:—

> "The current, that with gentle murmur glides,
> Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage;
> But, when his fair course is not hindered,
> He makes sweet music with the enamell'd stones,
> Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
> He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;
> And so by many winding nooks he strays,
> With willing sport, to the wild ocean." §

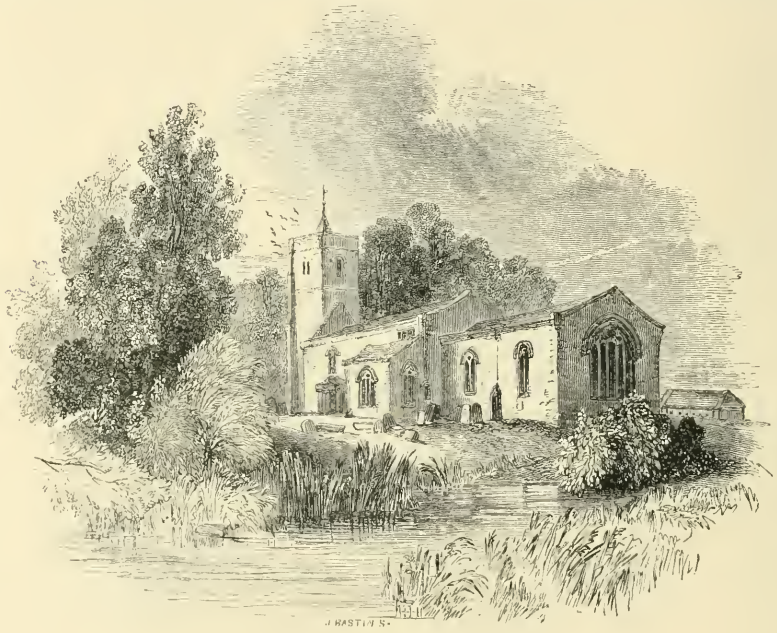
[Near Alveston.]

The solitary boat of the young poet may be fancied floating down this "current." There is not a sound to disturb his quiet, but the gentle murmur when "the waving sedges play with wind."‖ As the boat glides unsteered into some winding nook, the swan ruffles his proud crest; and the quick eye of the naturalist sees his mate deep hidden in the reeds and osiers:—

> "So doth the swan her downy cygnets save,
> Keeping them prisoner underneath her wings." ¶

* Macbeth, Act IV., Scene II. † Winter's Tale, Act IV., Scene II. ‡ Wordsworth.
§ Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act II., Scene VII. ‖ Induction to Taming of the Shrew.
¶ Henry VI., Part I., Act V., Scene III.

Very lovely is this Avon for some miles above Stratford; a poet's river in its beauty and its peacefulness. It is disturbed with no sound of traffic; it holds its course unvexed by man through broad meadows and wooded acclivities, which for generations seem to have been dedicated to solitude. All the great natural features of the river must have suffered little change since the time of Shakspere. Inundations in some places may have widened the channel; osier islands may have grown up where there was once a broad stream. But we here look upon the same scenery upon which he looked, as truly as we gaze upon the same blue sky, and see its image in the same glassy water. As we unmoor our boat from the fields near Bishop's Hampton,* we look back upon the church embosomed in lofty trees. The church is new; but it stands upon



[Old Church of Hampton Lucy.]

the same spot as the ancient church: its associations are the same. We glide by Charlcote. The house has been enlarged; its antique features somewhat improved; but it is essentially the same as the Charlcote of Shakspere. We pass its sunny lawns, and are soon amidst the unchanging features of nature. We are between deep wooded banks. Even the deer, who swim from shore to shore where the river is wide and open, are prevented invading these quiet deeps. The old turrets rising amidst the trees alone tell us that human habitation is at hand. A little onward, and we lose all trace of that culture which is ever changing the face of nature. There is a high bank called Old Town, where perhaps men and women, with their joys and sorrows, once abided. It

* The old name for Hampton Lucy.

[A Peep at Charlcote.]

is colonized by rabbits. The elder-tree drops its white blossoms luxuriantly over their brown burrows. The golden cups of the yellow water-lilies lie brilliantly beneath on their green couches. The reed-sparrow and the willow-wren sing their small songs around us: a stately heron flaps his heavy wing above. The tranquillity of the place is almost solemn; and a broad cloud deepens the solemnity, by throwing for a while the whole scene into shadow. We have a book with us that Shakspere might have looked upon in the same spot two hundred and sixty years ago; a new book then, but even then seeking to go back into the past, in the antique phraseology adopted by the young author. It is the first work of Spenser,—'The Shepherd's Calendar,' originally

[Old Town.]

printed in 1579. Let us pause a little upon its pages; and thence look back also-with a brief glance, at the poetical models in his own language which were open to the study of one who, without models, was destined to found the greatest school of poetry which the world had seen.

Spenser, displeased with the artificial character of the literature of his own early time, its mythological affectations, its mincing and foreign phraseology, thought to infuse into it a more healthy tone by familiarizing the court of Elizabeth with the diction of the age of Edward III. The attempt was not successful. His friend and editor, E. K., indeed says,—"In my opinion it is one especial praise, of many which are due to this poet, that he hath laboured to restore, as to their rightful heritage, such good and natural English words as have been long time out of use, and almost clean disherited. Which is the only cause that our mother tongue, which truly of itself is both full enough of prose, and stately enough for verse, hath long time been counted most bare and barren of both."* But even Sidney, to whom the work was dedicated, will not admit the principle which Spenser was endeavouring to establish: — "'The

[Spenser.]

Shepherd's Calendar' hath much poetry in his eclogues worthy the reading, if I be not deceived. That same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow; since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sannazarius in Italian, did affect it."† Yet we can well imagine that 'The Shepherd's Calendar,' dropping in the way of the young recluse of Stratford, must have been exceedingly welcome. "Colin Clout, the new poet," as his editor calls him, had the stamp of originality upon him; and therefore our Shakspere would

* Epistle to Master Gabriel Harvey, prefixed to 'The Shepherd's Calendar,' edition 1579.

† Defence of Poesy.

agree that "his name shall come into the knowledge of men, and his worthiness be sounded in the trump of fame."* The images and the music of the despairing shepherd would rest upon his ear:—

"You naked trees, whose shadie leaves are lost,
Wherein the birds were wont to build their bowre,
And now are clothd with mosse and hoarie frost,
In steede of blossomes, wherewith your buds did floure;
I see your teares that from your boughes do raine,
Whose drops in drerie ysicles remaine.

All so my lustfull leafe is drie and sere,
My timely buds with wayling all are wasted;
The blossome which my braunch of youth did beare,
With breathed sighes is blowne away and blasted;
And from mine eyes the drizling teares descend,
As on your boughes the ysicles depend." †

We read the passage, and our memory involuntarily turns to the noble commencement of one of Shakspere's own Sonnets:—

"That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang." ‡

But here we also see the difference between the two poets. Shakspere's comparison of his declining energies with the "bare ruin'd choirs" of the woods of autumn has all the power of reality. The love-sick shepherd who "compareth his careful case to the sad season of the year, to the frosty ground, to the frozen trees, and to his own winterbeaten flock,"§ is an affectation. The pastoral poetry of all ages and nations is open in some degree to this objection; but Spenser, who makes his shepherds bitter controversialists in theology, has carried the *falsetto* style a degree too far even for those who can best appreciate the real poetical power which is to be discovered in these early productions. One passage in these Eclogues sounded, as we think, a note that must have sunk deeply into the ambition of him who must very early have looked upon the thoughts and habits of real life as the proper staple of poetry:—

"Who ever casts to compasse wightie prise,
And thinkes to throwe out thundring words of threat,
Set powre in lavish cups and thriftie bittes of meate,
For Bacchus fruite is friend to Phœbus wise;
And, when with wine the braine begins to sweat,
The numbers flow as fast as spring doth rise.

Thou kenst not, Percie, how the rime should rage:
O, if my temples were distain'd with wine,
And girt in girlonds of wilde yvie twine,
How could I reare the muse on stately stage,
And teach her tread aloft in buskin fine,
With queint Bellona in her equipage?" ‖

* Epistle, &c. † Eclogue 1.
‡ Sonnet 73. § Argument to the Eclogue. ‖ Eclogue 10.

These verses sound to us exceedingly like a sarcasm upon the "huft, puft, braggart" vein of the drama which preceded Shakspere by a few years, and which fixed its character even upon the first efforts of the great masters whose light soon gleamed out of this dun smoke. It was no doubt a drunken drama. But there was one in whom we believe the desire was early planted to raise dramatic composition into a high art. The shepherd who speaks these lines in the 'Calendar' is represented in the argument as "the perfect pattern of a poet, which, finding no maintenance of his state and studies, complaineth of the contempt of poetry, and the causes thereof." The cause of the contempt was the want of true poets. The same argument says of poetry, that it is "a divine gift, and heavenly instinct, not to be gotten by labour and learning, but adorned with both, and poured into the wit by a certain *Enthousiasmos* and celestial inspiration." In the case of Shakspere the Enthousiasmos must have come early; nor, in our minds, were the labour and learning wanted to direct it. The great model of Spenser, in his early efforts, was Chaucer. Chaucer too was his later veneration:—

"Dan Chaucer, well of English undefyled." *

In 'The Shepherd's Calendar' Chaucer is "Tityrus, god of shepherds:"—

"Goe, little Calender! thou hast a free passeporte;
Goe but a lowly gate amongst the meaner sorte:
Dare not to match thy pype with Tityrus his stile." †

The greatest minds at the period of which we are writing reverenced Chaucer. Sidney says of him,—"I know not whether to marvel more either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age go so stumblingly after him." ‡ Passing over the minor poetry with which Shakspere must have been familiar,—the elegance of Wyatt, the tenderness of Surrey, the dignity of Sackville, the broad humour of Skelton,—we have little hesitation in believing that the poetical master of Shakspere was Chaucer. But whilst Spenser imitated his style, Shakspere penetrated into the secret of that excellence which is almost independent of style. The natural and moral world was displayed before each; and they became its interpreters, each after his own peculiar genius.

And yet, whilst we believe that Shakspere was the pupil of Chaucer; whilst we imagine that the fine bright folio of 1542, whose bold black letter seems the proper dress for the rich antique thought, was the closet companion of the young poet; that in his solitary walks unbidden tears came into his eyes when he recollected some passage of matchless pathos, or irrepressible laughter arose at those touches of genial humour which glance like sunbeams over the page—comparing, too, Chaucer's fresh descriptions with the freshest things under the sky, and seeing how the true painter of Nature makes even her loveliness more lovely;—believing all this, we yet reverentially own that this wondrous

* Fairy Queen, book iv., canto 2. † Epilogue to the 'Calender.'
‡ Defence of Poesy.

excellence was incommunicable, was not to be imitated. But nevertheless the early familiarity with such a poet as Chaucer must have been a loadstar to one like Shakspere, who was launched into the great ocean of thought without a chart. The narrow seas of poetry had been navigated by others, and their track might be followed by the common adventurer. Chaucer would disclose to him the possibility of delineating individual character with the minutest accuracy, without separating the individual from the permanent and the universal. Chaucer would show him how a high morality might still consist with freedom of thought and even laxity of expression, and how all that is holy and beautiful might be loved without such scorn or hatred of the impure and the evil as would exclude them from human sympathy. Chaucer, working as an artist, would inform him what stores lay hidden of old traditions and fables, legends that had travelled from one nation to another, gathering new circumstances as they became clothed in new language, the property of every people, related in the peasant's cabin, studied in the scholar's cell; and he would teach him that these were the best materials for a poet to work upon, for their universality proved that they were akin to man's inmost nature and feelings. In these, and in many more things, Chaucer would be the teacher of Shakspere. The pupil became greater than the master, partly through the greater comprehensiveness of his genius, and partly through its dramatic direction. The form of their art was essentially different, but yet the spirit was very much the same. These two poets, England's two greatest poets, have so much in common, that we scarcely regard the different modes in which they worked when we think of their mutual characteristics. Each is equally unapproachable in his humour as in his pathos; each is so masterly a delineator of character that we converse with the beings of their creation as if they had moved and breathed around us; each is the closest and the clearest painter of external nature; each has the profoundest skill in the management of language, so as to send his thoughts with the greatest effect, and with the least apparent effort, into the depths of the understanding; each, according to his own theory, is a perfect master of harmonious numbers. What was superadded in Shakspere sets him above all comparison with any other poet. But with Chaucer he may be compared; and having so much in common with him, it is impossible not to feel that the writings of Chaucer must have had an incalculable influence on the formation of the mind of Shakspere.

Such were the speculations that came across us in that silent reach of the Avon below Charlcote. But the silence is broken. The old fisherman of Alveston paddles up the stream to look for his eel-pots. We drop down the current. Nothing can be more interesting than the constant variety which this beautiful river here exhibits. Now it passes under a high bank clothed with wood; now a hill waving with corn gently rises from the water's edge. Sometimes a flat meadow presents its grassy margin to the current which threatens to inundate it upon the slightest rise; sometimes long lines of willow or alder shut out the land, and throw their deep shadows over the placid stream. Islands of sedge here and there render the channel unnavigable, except to

the smallest boat. A willow thrusting its trunk over the stream reminds us of Ophelia:—

> "There is a willow grows askaunt the brook
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream." *

A gust of wind raises the underside of the leaves to view, and we then perceive the exquisite correctness of the epithet "hoar." Hawthorns, here and there, grow upon the water's edge; and the dog-rose spots the green bank with its faint red. That deformity, the pollard-willow, is not so frequent as in most rivers; but the unlopped trees wear their feathery branches, as graceful as ostrich-plumes. The gust which sings through that long colonnade of willows is blowing up a rain-storm. The wood-pigeons, who have been feeding on the banks, wing their way homewards. The old fisherman is hurrying down the current to the shelter of his cottage. He invites us to partake that shelter. His family are busy at their trade of basket-making; and the humble roof, with its cheerful fire, is a welcome retreat out of the driving storm. It is a long as well as furious rain. We open the volume of Shakspere's own poems; and we bethink us what of these he may have composed, or partly shadowed out, wandering on this river-side, or drifting under its green banks, when his happy and genial nature instinctively shaped itself into song, as the expression of his sympathy with the beautiful world around him.

* Hamlet, Act IV., Scene VII.

[Below Charlcote.]

"The first heir of my invention."—This may be literally true of the Venus and Adonis, but it does not imply that the young poet had not been a diligent cultivator of fragmentary verse long before he had attempted so sustained a composition as this most original and remarkable poem. We must carry back our minds to the published poetry of 1593, when the Venus and Adonis appeared, fully to understand the originality of this production. Spenser had indeed then arisen to claim the highest rank in his own proper walk. Six books of 'The Fairy Queen' had been published two or three years. But, rejoicing as Shakspere must have done in 'The Fairy Queen,' in his own poems we cannot trace the slightest imitation of that wonderful performance; and it is especially remarkable how steadily he resists the temptation to imitate the archaisms which Spenser's popularity must have rendered fashionable. If we go back eight or ten years, and suppose, which we have fairly a right to do, that Shakspere was a writer of verse before he was twenty, the absence of any recent models upon which he could found a style will be almost as remarkable, in the case of his narrative compositions, as in that of his dramas. In William Webbe's 'Discourse of English Poetrie,' published in 1586, Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and Skelton are the old poets whom he commends. His immediate predecessors, or contemporaries, are—"Master George Gascoigne, a witty gentleman, and the very chief of our late rhymers," Surrey, Vaux, Norton, Bristow, Edwards, Tusser, Churchyard, Hunnis, Heywood, Hill, the Earl of Oxford (who "may challenge to himself the title of the most excellent" among "noble lords and gentlemen in her Majesty's court, which in the rare devices of poetry have been and yet are most excellent skilful"); Phaer, Twyne, Golding, Googe, and Fleming the translators; Whetstone, Munday. The eminence of Spenser, even before the publication of 'The Fairy Queen,' is thus acknowledged:—"This place have I purposely reserved for one, who, if not only, yet in my judgment principally, deserveth the title of the rightest English poet that ever I read: that is, the author of 'The Shepherd's Calendar.'" George Puttenham, whose 'Arte of English Poesie' was published in 1589, though probably written somewhat earlier, mentions with commendation among the later sort—"For eclogue and pastoral poesy, Sir Philip Sidney and Master Challenner, and that other gentleman who wrate the late 'Shepherd's Calendar.' For ditty and amorous ode I find Sir Walter Raleigh's vein most lofty, insolent, and passionate. Master Edward Dyer for elegy most sweet, solemn, and of high conceit. Gascoigne for a good metre and for a plentiful vein." The expression—"that other gentleman who wrate the late 'Shepherd's Calendar'"—would fix the date of this passage of Puttenham almost immediately subsequent to the publication of Spenser's poem in 1579, the author being still unknown. Shakspere, then, had very few examples amongst his contemporaries, even of the first and most obvious excellence of the Venus and Adonis—"the perfect sweetness of the versification."* To continue the thought of the same critic, this power of versification was "evidently original, and not the result of

* Coleridge 'Biographia Literaria.'

an easily imitable mechanism." But, at the same time, he could not have attained the perfection displayed in the Venus and Adonis without a long and habitual practice, which could alone have bestowed the mechanical facility. It is not difficult to trace in that poem itself portions which might have been written as the desultory exercises of a young poet, and afterwards worked up so as to be imbedded in the narrative. Such is the description of the steed; such of the hare-hunt. Upon the principle upon which we have regarded the Sonnets, that they are fragmentary compositions, arbitrarily strung together, there can be no difficulty in assigning several of these, and especially those which are addressed to a mistress, to that period of the poet's life of which his own recollection would naturally suggest the second stage in his Seven Ages. "The lover sighing like furnace" would have poured himself out in juvenile conceits, such as characterize the Sonnets numbered 135, 136, 143; or in playful tokens of affection, such as the 128th, the 130th, the 145th; or in complaining stanzas, "a woeful ballad," such as the 131st and 132nd. The little poems of The Passionate Pilgrim which can properly be ascribed to Shakspere have the decided character of early fragments. The beautiful elegiac stanzas of Love's Labour's Lost have the same stamp upon them; as well as similar passages in The Comedy of Errors. The noble scene of the death of Talbot and his son, forming the 5th, 6th, and 7th scenes of the 4th act of Henry VI., Part I., are so different in the structure of their versification from the other portions of the play that we may fairly regard them as forming a considerable part of some separate poem, and that perhaps not originally dramatic. "The period," says Malone, "at which Shakspeare began to write for the stage will, I fear, never be precisely ascertained."* Probably not. But in the absence of this precise information it is a far more reasonable theory that he was educating himself in dramatic as well as poetical composition generally at an early period of his life, when such a mind could not have existed without strong poetical aspirations, than the prevailing belief that the first publication of the Venus and Adonis, and his production of an original drama, were nearly contemporaneous. This theory assumes that his poetical capacity was suddenly developed, very nearly in its perfection, at the mature age of twenty-eight, in the midst of the laborious occupation of an actor, who had no claim for reward amongst his fellows but as an actor. We, on the contrary, consider that we adopt not only a more reasonable view, but one which is supported by all existing evidence, external and internal, when we regard his native fields as Shakspere's poetical school. Believing that, in the necessary leisure of a country life,—encumbered as we think with no cares of wool-stapling or glove-making, neither educating youth at the charge-house like his own Holofernes, nor even collecting his knowledge of legal terms at an attorney's desk, but a free and happy agriculturist,—the young Shakspere not exactly "lisped in numbers," but cherished and cultivated the faculty when "the numbers came;" we yield ourselves up to the poetical notion, because it is at the same time the more rational and consistent one.

* Posthumous Life, p. 167.

that the genius of verse cherished her young favourite on these "willow's banks:"—

> "Here, as with honey gather'd from the rock,
> She fed the little prattler, and with songs
> Oft sooth'd his wondering ears; with deep delight
> On her soft lap he sat, and caught the sounds." *

* Joseph Warton.

[Near Alveston.]

[Near Ludington.]

NOTE ON THE SCENERY OF THE AVON.

The Avon of Warwickshire, called the Upper Avon, necessarily derives its chief interest from its associations with Shakspere. His contemporaries connected his fame with his native river :—

> " Sweet swan of Avon, what a sight it were,
> To see thee in our waters yet appear,
> And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
> That so did take Eliza and our James!"

So wrote Jonson in his manly lines, 'To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us.' After him came Davenant, with a pretty conceit that the river had lost its beauty when the great poet no longer dwelt upon its banks :—

> " Beware, delighted poets, when you sing,
> To welcome nature in the early spring,
> Your numerous feet not tread
> The banks of Avon ; for each flow'r,
> As it ne'er knew a sun or show r,
> Hangs there the pensive head.

Each tree, whose thick and spreading growth hath made
Rather a night beneath the boughs than shade,
Unwilling now to grow,
Looks like the plume a captain wears,
Whose rifled falls are steep'd i' the tears
Which from his last rage flow.

The piteous river wept itself away
Long since, alas! to such a swift decay,
That, reach the map, and look
If you a river there can spy,
And, for a river, your mock'd eye
Will find a shallow brook." *

Joseph Warton describes fair Fancy discovering the infant Shakspere "on the winding Avon's willowed banks." Thomas Warton has painted the scenery of the Avon and its associations with a bright pencil:—

"Avon, thy rural views, thy pastures wild,
The willows that o'erhang thy twilight edge,
Their boughs entangling with the embattled sedge,
Thy brink with watery foliage quaintly fringed,
Thy surface with reflected verdure tinged;
Soothe me with many a pensive pleasure mild.
But while I muse, that here the Bard Divine,
Whose sacred dust yon high-arch'd aisles enclose,
Where the tall windows rise in stately rows,
Above th' embowering shade,
Here first, at Fancy's fairy-circled shrine,
Of daisies pied his infant offering made;
Here playful yet, in stripling years unripe,
Framed of thy reeds a shrill and artless pipe
Sudden thy beauties, Avon, all are fled,
As at the waving of some magic wand;
An holy trance my charmed spirit wings,
And awful shapes of leaders and of kings,
People the busy mead,
Like spectres swarming to the wizard's hall;
And slowly pace, and point with trembling hand
The wounds ill-cover'd by the purple pall.
Before me Pity seems to stand,
A weeping mourner, smote with anguish sore
To see Misfortune rend in frantic mood
His robe, with regal woes embroider'd o'er.
Pale Terror leads the visionary band,
And sternly shakes his sceptre, dropping blood." †

The well-known lines of Gray are amongst his happiest efforts:—

"Far from the sun and summer gale,
In thy green lap was Nature's Darling laid,
What time, where lucid Avon stray'd,
To him the mighty mother did unveil
Her awful face: the dauntless child
Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smiled.
'This pencil take,' she said, 'whose colours clear
Richly paint the vernal year:
Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy!
This can unlock the gates of joy;
Of horror that, and thrilling fears,
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears.' ‡

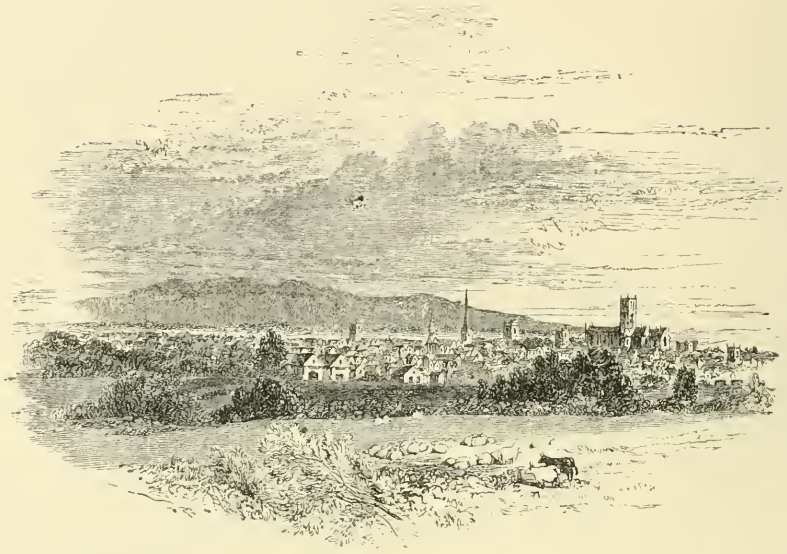
These quotations sufficiently show that the presiding genius of the Avon is Shakspere. But even without this paramount association, the river, although little visited, abounds with picturesque scenery and interesting objects. A big, dull book has been written upon it, by one who could

* In Remembrance of Master William Shakspeare. Ode.
† Monody, written near Stratford-upon-Avon. ‡ The Progress of Poesy.

neither put down with exactness what he saw, nor impart any life to his meagre descriptions. From the first section of his book, which tells us that "The river Avon derives its source from a spring called Avon Well in the village of Naseby," to the last, in which he informs us that "Avon's friendly streams with Severn join," the 'Picturesque Views' of Mr. Samuel Ireland appear to us the production of the most spiritless of delineators. We would not recommend the tourist to encumber himself with this heavy book. The associations of the Avon with Shakspere may be considered to begin in the neighbourhood of Kenilworth. The river is not navigable above Stratford, and therefore the traveller will find it no very easy matter to trace its course; but still a pedestrian can overcome many difficulties. The beautiful grounds of Guy's Cliff are shown to visitors. A little below, a boat will convey the wayfarer through somewhat tame scenery to Warwick Bridge. The noble castle is an object never to be forgotten; and perhaps there is no pile of similar interest in England which in so high a degree unites the beautiful with the magnificent. The Avon flows for a considerable distance through the domain of the castle. Below, the left bank is bold and well-wooded, especially near Barford. The reader may now trace the river by the little map (p. 232). The course of the stream is generally through flat meadows from Barford to Hampton Lucy; but the high ground of Fulbrooke offers a great variety of picturesque scenery, and occasionally one or the other bank is lofty and precipitous, as at Hampton Wood. The reader is already familiar with the characteristics of the river from Hampton Lucy to Stratford. The most romantic spot is Hatton Rock; a bank of considerable height, where the current, narrow and rapid, washes the base of the cliff, which is luxuriantly wooded. The river view of Stratford, as we approach the bridge, is exceedingly picturesque. When we have passed the church and the mill we may follow the river, by the tow-path on the right bank, the whole way to Bidford. The views are not very picturesque till we have passed the confluence of the Stour. Near Ludington we meet at every turn with subjects for the sketch-book. Opposite Welford, on the pathway to Hilborough, the landscape is very lovely. A mill is always a picturesque object; and here is one that seems to have held its place for many a century. Of the Grange and of Bidford we have often spoken. Below the little

[The Mill; Welford.]

town the river becomes a much more important stream; and the left bank for several miles will appear bold and romantic even to those who are familiar with the Wye. This is especially the case under the Marl Cliff Hill. Here the Arrow contributes its rapid waters to swell the stream We have now quitted Warwickshire. As we approach Evesham the town with its noble tower and ancient spires forms a most interesting termination to such a walk of three days as we have now briefly traced.



[Worcester.]

CHAPTER XVI.

A DAY AT WORCESTER.

The hospitality of our ancestors was founded upon their sympathies with each other's joys and sorrows. The festivals of the church, the celebrations of sheep-shearing and harvest-home, the Mayings, were occasions of general gladness. But upon the marriage of a son or of a daughter, at the christening of a child, the humblest assembled their neighbours to partake of their particular rejoicing. So was it also with their sorrows. Death visited a family, and its neighbours came to mourn. To be absent from the house of mourning would have seemed as if there was not a fellowship in sorrow as well as in joy. Christian neighbours in those times looked upon each other as members of the same family. Their intimacy was much more constant and complete than in days that are thought more refined. Privacy was not looked upon as a desirable thing. The latch of every door was lifted without knocking, and the dance in

the hall was arranged the instant some young taborer struck a note; or the gossip's bowl was passed around the winter fire-side, to jest and song:—

> "And then the whole quire hold their hips and loffe,
> And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear
> A merrier hour was never wasted there." *

Young men married early. In the middle ranks there was little outfit required to begin housekeeping. A few articles of useful furniture satisfied their simple tastes; and we doubt not there was as much happiness seated on the wooden bench as now on the silken ottoman, and as light hearts tripped over the green rushes as upon the Persian carpet. A silver bowl or two, a few spoons, constituted the display of the more ambitious; but for use the treen platter was at once clean and substantial, though the pewter dish sometimes graced a solemn merry-making. Employment, especially agricultural, was easily obtained by the industrious; and the sons of the yeomen, whose ambition did not drive them into the towns to pursue commerce, or to the universities to try for the prizes of professions, walked humbly and contentedly in the same road as their fathers had walked before them. They tilled a little land with indifferent skill, and their herds and flocks gave food and raiment to their household. Surrounded by the cordial intimacies of the class to which he belonged, it is not difficult to understand how William Shakspere married early; and the very circumstance of his so marrying is tolerably clear evidence of the course of life in which he was brought up.

It has been a sort of fashion of late years to consider that Shakspere was clerk to an attorney. Thomas Nash in 1589 published this sentence: "It is a common practice now-a-days, among a sort of shifting companions, that run through every art and thrive by none, to leave the trade of *Noverint*, whereto they were born, and busy themselves with the endeavours of art, that could scarcely latinize their neck-verse if they should have need; yet English Seneca, read by candlelight, yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a Beggar*, and so forth: and, if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole ***Hamlets,*** I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches.† This quotation is held to furnish the external evidence that Shakspere had been an attorney, by the connection here implied of "the trade of Noverint" and "whole Hamlets." Noverint was the technical beginning of a bond ‡ It is imputed, then, by Nash, to a sort of shifting companions, that, running through every art and thriving by none, they attempt dramatic composition, drawing their tragical speeches from English Seneca. Does this description apply to Shakspere? Was he thriving by no art? In 1589 he was established in life as a sharer in the Blackfriars Theatre. Does the use of the term "whole Hamlets" fix the allusion upon him? It appears to us only to show that some tragedy called 'Hamlet,' it may be Shakspere's was then in existence; and that it was a play

* A Midsummer-Night's Dream, Act II., Scene I.

† Epistle prefixed to Greene's 'Arcadia,' by Thomas Nash.

‡ See Shakspere's Marriage-Bond: Note to this Chapter.

also at which Nash might sneer as abounding with tragical speeches. But it does not seem to us that there is any absolute connection between the Noverint and the Hamlet. Suppose, for example, that the Hamlet alluded to was written by Marlowe, who was educated at Cambridge, and was certainly not a lawyer's clerk. The sentence will read as well; the sarcasm upon the tragical speeches of the Hamlet will be as pointed; the shifting companion who has thriven by no art, and has left the calling to which he was born, may study English Seneca till he produces "whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches." In the same way Nash might have said whole Tamburlaines of tragical speeches, without attempting to infer that the author of 'Tamburlaine had left the trade of Noverint. We believe that the allusion was to Shakspere's Hamlet, but that the first part of the sentence had no allusion to Shakspere's occupation. The context of the passage renders the matter even clearer. Nash begins,—"I will turn back to my first text of studies of delight, and talk a little in friendship with a few of our trivial translators." Nash aspired to the reputation of a scholar; and he directs his satire against those who attempted the labours of scholarship without the requisite qualifications. The trivial translators could scarcely latinize their neck-verse—they could scarcely repeat the verse of Scripture which was the ancient form of praying the benefit of clergy. Seneca, however, might be read in English. We have then to ask was Hamlet a translation or an adaptation from Seneca? Did Shakspere ever attempt to found a play upon the model of Seneca; to be a trivial translator of him; even to transfuse his sentences into a dramatic composition? If this imputation does not hold good against Shakspere, the mention of Hamlet has no connection with the shifting companion who is thus talked to as a trivial translator. Nash does not impute these qualities to Hamlet, but to those who busy themselves with the endeavours of art in adapting sentences from Seneca which should rival whole Hamlets in tragical speeches. And then he immediately says, "But, O grief! *Tempus edax rerum*;—what is it that will last always? The sea exhaled by drops will in continuance be dry; and Seneca, let blood line by line, and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage."

The external evidence of this passage (and it is the only evidence of such a character that has been found) wholly fails, we think, in showing that Shakspere was in 1589 reputed to have been an attorney. But had he pursued this occupation, either at Stratford or in London, it is tolerably clear that there would have been ample external evidence for the establishment of the fact. In those times an attorney was employed in almost every transaction between man and man of any importance. Deeds, bonds, indentures, were much more common when legal documents were untaxed, and legal assistance was comparatively cheap. To every document attesting witnesses were numerous; and the attorney's clerk, as a matter of course, was amongst the number. Such papers and parchments are better secured against the ravages of time than any other manuscripts. It is scarcely possible that, if Shakspere had been an attorney's clerk, his name would not have appeared in some such document, as a subscribing

witness.* No such signature has ever been found. This fact appears to us to dispose of Malone's confident belief that upon Shakspere leaving school he was placed for two or three years in the office of one of the seven attorneys who practised in the Court of Record in Stratford. Malone adds, "The comprehensive mind of our poet, it must be owned, embraced almost every object of nature, every trade, and every art, the manners of every description of men, and the general language of almost every profession: but his knowledge and application of legal terms seem to me not merely such as might have been acquired by the casual observation of his all-comprehending mind; it has the appearance of technical skill; and he is so fond of displaying it on all occasions, that there is, I think, some ground for supposing that he was early initiated in at least the forms of law."† Malone then cites a number of passages exemplifying Shakspere's knowledge and application of legal terms. The theory was originally propounded by Malone in his edition of 1790; and it gave rise to many subsequent notes of the commentators, pointing out these technical allusions. The frequency of their occurrence, and the accuracy of their use, are, however, no proof to us that Shakspere was professionally a lawyer. There is every reason to believe that the principles of law, especially the law of real property, were much more generally understood in those days than in our own. Educated men, especially those who possessed property, looked upon law as a science instead of a mystery; and its terms were used in familiar speech instead of being regarded as a technical jargon. When Hamlet says, "This fellow might be in his time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizancies his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries," he employs terms with which every gentleman was familiar, because the owner of property was often engaged in a practical acquaintance with them. This is one of the examples given by Malone. "No writer," again says Malone, "but one who had been conversant with the technical language of leases and other conveyances, would have used *determination* as synonymous to *end*." He refers to a passage in the 13th Sonnet,—

> "So should that beauty which you hold in lease
> Find no *determination*."

We may add that Coriolanus uses the verb in the same way:—

> "Shall I be charg'd no further than this present
> Must all *determine* here?"

The word is used as a term of law, with a full knowledge of its primary meaning; and so Shakspere uses it. The chroniclers use it in the same way. Upon the passage in the Sonnets to which we have just referred, Malone has a note, with a parallel passage from Daniel:—

* Mr. Wheler, of Stratford, having taken up the opinion many years ago, upon the suggestion of Malone, that Shakspere might have been in an attorney's office, has availed himself of his opportunities as a solicitor to examine hundreds of documents of Shakspere's time, in the hope of discovering his signature. The examination was altogether fruitless.

† Posthumous 'Life.'

"In *beauty's lease* expir'd appears
The date of age, the calends of our death."

Daniel was not a lawyer, but a scholar and a courtier. Upon the passage in Richard III.,—

"Tell me, what state, what dignity, what honour,
Canst thou *demise* to any child of mine?"—

Malone asks what poet but Shakspere has used the word *demise* in this sense; observing that "hath demised, granted, and to farm let" is the constant language of leases. Being the constant language, a man of the world would be familiar with it. A quotation from a theologian may show this familiarity as well as one from a poet:—"I conceive it ridiculous to make the condition of an *indenture* something that is necessarily annexed to the possession of the *demise*." If Warburton had used law-terms in this logical manner, we might have recollected his early career; but we do not learn that Hammond, the great divine from whom we quote, had any other than a theological education. We are further told, when Shallow says to Davy, in Henry IV., "Are those *precepts* served?" that *precepts*, in this sense, is a word only known in the office of a justice of peace. Very different would it have been indeed from Shakspere's usual precision, had he put any word in the mouth of a justice of peace that was not known in his office. When the Boatswain, in The Tempest, roars out 'Take in the topsail," he uses a phrase that is known only on shipboard. In the passage of Henry IV., Part II.,—

"For what in me was *purchas'd*,
Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort,"—

it is held that *purchase*, being used in its strict legal sense, could be known only to a lawyer. An educated man could scarcely avoid knowing the great distinction of *purchase* as opposed to *descent*, the only two modes of acquiring real estate. This general knowledge, which it would be very remarkable if Shakspere had not acquired, involves the use of the familiar law-terms of his day, *fee simple*, *fine* and *recovery*, *entail*, *remainder*, *escheat*, *mortgage*. The commonest *practice* of the law, such as a sharp boy would have learnt in two or three casual attendances upon the Bailiff's Court at Stratford, would have familiarized Shakspere very early with the words which are held to imply considerable technical knowledge—*action*, *bond*, *warrant*, *bill*, *suit*, *plea*, *arrest*. It must not be forgotten that the terms of law, however they may be technically applied, belong to the habitual commerce of mankind; they are no abstract terms, but essentially deal with human acts, and interests, and thoughts: and it is thus that, without any fanciful analogies, they more readily express the feelings of those who use them with a general significancy, than any other words that the poet could apply. A writer who has carried the theory of Shakspere's professional occupation farther even than Malone, holds that the Poems are especially full of these technical terms; and he gives many instances from the Venus and Adonis, the Lucrece, and the Sonnets, saying, "they

swarm in his poems even to deformity."* Surely, when we read those exquisite lines,—

> "When to the *sessions* of sweet silent thought
> I *summon* up remembrance of things past,"—

we think of anything else than the judge and the crier of the court; and yet this is one of the examples produced in proof of this theory. Dryden's noble use of "the last *assizes*" is no evidence that he was a lawyer.† Many similar instances are given, equally founded, we think, upon the mistake of believing that the technical language has no relation to the general language. Metaphorical, no doubt, are some of these expressions, such as

> "But be contented when that fell *arrest*
> Without all *bail* shall carry me away;"

but the metaphors are as familiar to the reader as to the poet himself. They present a clear and forcible image to the mind; and, looking at the habits of society, they can scarcely be called technical. Dekker describes the conversation at the third-rate London ordinary:—"There is another ordinary, at which your London usurer, your stale bachelor, and your thrifty attorney do resort; the price three-pence; the rooms as full of company as a jail; and indeed divided into several wards, like the beds of an hospital. The compliment between these is not much, their words few; for the belly hath no ears: every man's eye here is upon the other man's trencher, to note whether his fellow lurch him, or no: if they chance to discourse, it is of nothing but of statutes, bonds, recognizances, fines, recoveries, audits, rents, subsidies, sureties, enclosures, liveries, indictments, outlawries, feoffments, judgments, commissions, bankrupts, amercements, and of such horrible matter."‡ Here is pretty good evidence of the general acquaintance with the law's jargon; and Dekker, who is himself a dramatic poet, has put together in a few lines as many technical terms as we may find in Shakspere. It has been maintained, as we have mentioned, that our poet was brought up as a gardener, as proved by his familiarity with the terms and practice of the horticultural art. Malone, after citing his legal examples, says,—"Whenever as large a number of instances of his ecclesiastical or medicinal knowledge shall be produced, what has now been stated will certainly not be entitled to any weight." We shall not argue that none but an apothecary could have written the description of the vendor of drugs, and the culler of simples, in whose

> "needy shop a tortoise hung,
> An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
> Of ill-shap'd fishes; and about his shelves
> A beggarly account of empty boxes,
> Green earthen pots, bladders, and musty seeds." §

Nor do we hold, because he has mentioned the *ague* about a dozen times, he was familiar with the remedies for that disorder; nor that, when Falstaff describes the causes of *apoplexy* to the Chief Justice, and says that he has read

* Brown's Autobiographical Poems, &c.
† Ode on Mrs. Killigrew.
‡ Dekker's 'Gull's Hornbook.' 1609.
§ Romeo and Juliet, Act v., Scene 1.

of the effects in Galen, Shakspere had gone through a course of study in that author to qualify himself for a diploma. He does not use medical terms as frequently as legal, because they are not as apposite to the thoughts and situations of his speakers. It is the same with the terms of divinity, which Malone cannot find in such abundance as the terms of law. But if the terms be not there, assuredly the spirit lives in his pure teaching; and his philosophy is lighted up with something much higher than the moral irradiations of the unassisted understanding. Of his manifold knowledge it may be truly said, as he said of his own Henry V.,—

> "Hear him but reason in divinity,
> And, all-admiring, with an inward wish
> You would desire the king were made a prelate:
> Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
> You would say,—it hath been all-in-all his study:
> List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
> A fearful battle render'd you in music:
> Turn him to any cause of policy,
> The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
> Familiar as his garter; that, when he speaks,
> The air, a charter'd libertine, is still,
> And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears,
> To steal his sweet and honey'd sentences;
> So that the art and practick part of life
> Must be the mistress to this theoric." *

We should have thought it unnecessary to have added anything to the views which we thus entertained in 1843 (when the original edition of this Biography was published), had the subject not been invested with a new importance, in its treatment by the late Lord Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench. In 1859 Lord Campbell published a volume, entitled 'Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements considered.' The subject is approached by the learned Judge in a just and liberal spirit, essentially different from that of the Shaksperian critics of the last age. He holds "that there has been a great deal of misrepresentation and delusion as to Shakespeare's opportunities when a youth of acquiring knowledge, and as to the knowledge he had acquired. From a love of the incredible, and a wish to make what he afterwards accomplished actually miraculous, a band of critics have conspired to lower the condition of his father, and to represent the son, when approaching man's estate, as still almost wholly illiterate." We are gratified, that in recapitulating the various facts which militate against the vague traditions, and ignorant assumptions, some of which prevailed only a quarter of a century ago, Lord Campbell refers "to that most elaborate and entertaining book, Knight's 'Life of Shakspere,' 1st edit. p. 16." But, of the general argument comprised in our preceding five pages, Lord Campbell does not take the slightest notice. He no doubt weighed well all the points in which, with my own imperfect legal knowledge, I ventured to

* Henry V., Act I. Scene I.

doubt whether Shakspere was bred an attorney. He does not overlook the words of Nashe about "the trade of *Noverint*," and "whole Hamlets," but he thus judicially decides:—"Now, if the *innuendo* which would have been introduced into the declaration in an action, '*Shakespeare* v. *Nash*,' for this libel (—'thereby then and there meaning the said William Shakespeare'—) be made out, there can be no doubt as to the remaining *innuendo* 'thereby then and there meaning that the said William Shakespeare had been an attorney's clerk, or bred an attorney." With the most laudable industry Lord Campbell has made a selection from the Plays and Poems, occupying more than two-thirds of his book, to exhibit "expressions and allusions, that must be supposed to come from one that has been a professional lawyer." He also holds that Shakspere's will was in all probability composed by himself, and that "a testator without professional experience, could hardly have used language so appropriate as we find in this will to express his meaning." We should have thought that Lord Campbell, following up his own argument, that in this will, when Shakspere leaves his second best bed to his wife, he showed his technical skill by omitting the word *devise*, which he had used in disposing of his realty, might have stated that in this bequest Shakspere was aware that his wife was entitled to *dower;* and yet he does not hesitate to repeat the 'misrepresentation and delusion" which had been attached to this fact before we had the good fortune to discover that Shakspere on his death-bed did not exhibit a contemptuous neglect of his wife. Our argument is, we venture to hope, not affected by Lord Campbell's judicial sneers and exaggerated inferences:—"The *idolatrous* worshippers of Shakespeare, who think it necessary to make his moral qualities as exalted as his poetical genius, account for this sorry bequest, and for no other notice being taken of poor Mrs. Shakespeare in the will, by saying that he knew she was sufficiently provided for by her right of dower out of his landed property, which the law would give her; and they add that he *must* have been tenderly attached to her, because (they take upon themselves to say) she was exquisitely beautiful as well as strictly virtuous. But she was left by her husband without house or furniture (except the second best bed), or a kind word, or any other token of his love; and I sadly fear that between William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway the course of true love never did run smooth." Lord Campbell's plural "idolatrous worshippers" is a gentle form of referring to the one worshipper who originated this new view with regard to dower. That worshipper, in his idolatry, never held up Ann Hathaway as "exquisitely beautiful;" "strictly virtuous" he believed her to have been according to the custom of betrothment which existed in Shakspere's youth. With Lord Campbell's well-known habit of literary appropriation—"convey the wise it call"—did he forbear to adopt this interpretation because it was not discovered by a lawyer? The Chief Justice knew perfectly well that the right to dower totally upset all the inferences about the second best bed, which the Commentators—lawyers as some of them were—set forth, and which were currently accepted up to the time when I presumed to say that lawyers had shut their eyes to the fact.

We hold, then, that William Shakspere, the son of a possessor and cultivator of land, a gentleman by descent, married to the heiress of a good family, comfortable in his worldly circumstances, married the daughter of one in a similar rank of life, and in all probability did not quit his native place when he so married. The marriage-bond, which was discovered a few years since, has set at rest all doubt as to the name and residence of his wife. She is there described as Anne Hathwey, of Stratford, in the diocese of Worcester, maiden. Rowe, in his 'Life,' says,—"Upon his leaving school he seems to have given entirely into that way of living which his father proposed to him: and in order to settle in the world, after a family manner, he thought fit to marry while he was yet very young. His wife was the daughter of one Hathaway, said to have been a substantial yeoman in the neighbourhood of Stratford." At the hamlet of Shottery, which is in the parish of Stratford, the Hathaways had been settled forty years before the period of Shakspere's marriage; for in the Warwickshire Surveys, in the time of Philip and Mary, it is recited that John Hathaway held property at Shottery, by copy of court-roll, dated 20th of April, 34th of Henry VIII. (1543).* The Hathaway of Shakspere's time was named Richard; and the intimacy between him and John Shakspere is shown by a precept in an action against Richard Hathaway, dated 1576, in which John Shakspere is his bondman. Before the discovery of the marriage-bond Malone had found a confirmation of the traditional account that the maiden name of Shakspere's wife was Hathaway; for Lady Barnard, the grand-daughter of Shakspere, makes bequests in her will to the children of Thomas Hathaway, "her kinsman." But Malone doubts whether there were not other Hathaways than those of Shottery, residents in the town of Stratford, and not in the hamlet included in the parish. This is possible. But, on the other hand, the description in the marriage-bond of Anne Hathaway, as of Stratford, is no proof that she was not of Shottery; for such a document would necessarily have regard only to the parish of the person described. Tradition, always valuable when it is not opposed to evidence, has associated for many years the cottage of the Hathaways at Shottery with the wife of Shakspere. Garrick purchased relics out of it at the time of the Stratford Jubilee; Samuel Ireland afterwards carried off what was called Shakspere's courting-chair; and there is still in the house a very ancient carved bedstead, which has been handed down from descendant to descendant as an heirloom. The house was no doubt once adequate to form a comfortable residence for a substantial and even wealthy yeoman. It is still a pretty cottage, embosomed by trees, and surrounded by pleasant pastures; and

* The Shottery property, which was called Hewland, remained with the descendants of the Hathaways till 1838.

here the young poet might have surrendered his prudence to his affections:—

"As in the sweetest buds
The eating canker dwells, so eating love
Inhabits in the finest wits of all." *

The very early marriage of the young man, with one more than seven years his elder, has been supposed to have been a rash and passionate proceeding. Upon

[Shottery Cottage.]

the face of it, it appears an act that might at least be reproved in the words which follow those we have just quoted:—

"As the most forward bud
Is eaten by the canker ere it blow,
Even so by love the young and tender wit
Is turn'd to folly; blasting in the bud,
Losing his verdure even in the prime,
And all the fair effects of future hopes."

This is the common consequence of precocious marriages; but we are not therefore to conclude that "the young and tender wit" of our Shakspere was "turned to folly"—that his "forward bud" was "eaten by the canker"—that

* Two Gentlemen of Verona Act I., Scene I.

'his verdure" was lost "even in the prime," by his marriage with Anne Hathaway before he was nineteen. The influence which this marriage must have had upon his destinies was no doubt considerable; but it is too much to assume, as it has been assumed, that it was an unhappy influence. All that we *really* know of Shakspere's family life warrants the contrary supposition. We believe, to go no farther at present, that the marriage of Shakspere was one of affection; that there was no disparity in the worldly condition of himself and the object of his choice; that it was with the consent of friends; that there were no circumstances connected with it which indicate that it was either forced or clandestine, or urged on by an artful woman to cover her apprehended loss of character. Taking up, as little as possible, a controversial attitude in a matter of such a nature, we shall shape our course according to this belief.

In the last week of November, in the year 1582, let us look upon a cheerful family scene in the pretty village of Clifford. The day is like a green old age, "frosty but kindly." The sun shines brightly upon the hills, over which a happy party have tripped from Stratford. It is a short walk of some mile and a half. The village stands very near the confluence of the Stour with the Avon. It is Sunday; and after the service there is to be a christening. The visitors assemble at a substantial house, and proceed reverently to church. The age is not yet arrived when the cold formalities of a listless congregation have usurped the place of real devotion. The responses are made with the earnest voice which indicates the full heart; and the young, especially, join in the choral parts of the service, so as to preserve one of the best characters of adoration, in offering a tribute of gladness to Him who has filled the world with beauty and joy. During the service the sacrament of baptism is administered with a reverential solemnity. William Shakspere had often been so present at its administration, and the ceremonial has appeared to him full of truth and holiness. But the opinions which were earnestly disseminated amongst the people, by teachers pretending to superior sanctity and wisdom, would be also familiar to him; and he would have learnt, from those who were opposed to most ancient ceremonial observances, that the signing with the Cross in baptism was a superstitious relic of Rome—a thing rejected by the understanding, and only preserved as a delusion of the imagination. A book with which he was familiar in after-life was not then written; but on such occasions of controversy it would occur to him that "the holy sign,' "imprinted on the gates of the palace of man's fancy," would suggest associations which to Christian men would be "a most effectual though a silent teacher to avoid whatsoever may deservedly procure shame." Through the imagination would this holy sign work; for "the mind, while we are in this present life, whether it contemplate, meditate, deliberate, or howsoever exercise itself, worketh nothing without continual recourse unto imagination, the only storehouse of wit, and peculiar chair of memory. On this anvil it ceaseth not day and night to strike, by means whereof, as the pulse declareth how the

heart doth work, so the very thoughts and cogitations of man's mind, be they good or bad, do nowhere sooner bewray themselves than through the crevices of that wall wherewith Nature hath compassed the cells and closets of fancy."* Such was the way in which the young Shakspere would, we think, religiously and philosophically, regard this ceremony; it would be so impressed upon his "imagination." But the service is ended; the gossips are assembled in the churchyard. A merry peal rings out from the old tower. Cordial welcome is

[Clifford Church.]

there within the yeoman's house, to whose family such an occasion as this is a joyful festival. The chief sponsors duly present the apostle-spoons to the child; but one old lady, who looks upon this practice as a luxurious innovation of modern times, is content to offer a christening shirt.† The refection of the guests aspires to daintiness as much as plenty; and the comely dames upon their departure do not hesitate to put the sweet biscuits and comfits into their

* Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' book v.

† See Note to this Chapter.

pockets. There is cordial salutation, at this meeting, of William Shakspere and his fair companion. He and Anne Hathaway are bound together by the trothplight. There is no secret as to this union; there is no affectation in conceaing their attachment. He speaks of her as his wife; she of him as her husband. He is tall and finely formed, with a face radiant with intellect, and capable of expressing the most cheerful and most tender emotions; she is in the full beauty of womanhood, glowing with health and conscious happiness. Some of the gossips whisper that she is too old for him; but his frank and manly bearing, and her beauty and buoyant spirits, would not suggest this, if some tattle about age was not connected with the whisper. No one of that company, except an envious rival, would hold that they were "misgraffed in respect of years." The Church is in a few days to cement the union, which, some weeks ago, was fixed by the public trothplight. They are *hand-fasted*, and they are happy.

There is every reason to believe that Shakspere was remarkable for manly beauty:—"He was a handsome, well-shaped man," says Aubrey. According to tradition, he played Adam in As You Like It, and the Ghost in Hamlet. Adam says,—

"Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty."

Upon his personation of the Ghost, Mr. Campbell has the following judicious remarks:—"It has been alleged, in proof of his mediocrity, that he enacted the part of his own Ghost, in Hamlet. But is the Ghost in Hamlet a very mean character? No: though its movements are few, they must be awfully graceful; and the spectral voice, though subdued and half-monotonous, must be solemn and full of feeling. It gives us an imposing idea of Shakspere's stature and mien to conceive him in this part. The English public, accustomed to see their lofty nobles, their Essexes, and their Raleighs, clad in complete armour, and moving under it with a majestic air, would not have tolerated the actor Shakspeare, unless he had presented an appearance worthy of the buried majesty of Denmark."* That he performed *kingly* parts is indicated by these lines, written, in 1611, by John Davies, in a poem inscribed 'To our English Terence, Mr. William Shakspeare:'—

"Some say, good Will, which I in sport do sing,
Hadst thou not play'd some *kingly parts* in sport,
Thou hadst been a companion for a king,
And been a king among the meaner sort."

The portrait by Martin Droeshout, prefixed to the edition of 1623, when Shakspere would be well remembered by his friends, gives a notion of a man of remarkably fine features, independent of the wonderful development of forehead. The lines accompanying it, which bear the signature B. I. (most likely Ben Jonson), attest the accuracy of the likeness. The bust at Stratford bears the same character. The sculptor was Gerard Johnson. It was probably erected soon after the poet's death; for it is mentioned by Leonard Digges, in his

* Remarks prefixed to Moxon's edition of the Dramatic Works.

verses upon the publication of Shakspere's collected works by his "pious fellows." All the circumstances of which we have any knowledge imply that Shakspere, at the time of his marriage, was such a person as might well have won the heart of a mistress whom tradition has described as eminently beautiful. Anne Hathaway at this time was of mature beauty. The inscription over her grave in the church of Stratford-upon-Avon states that she died on "the 6th day of August, 1623, being of the age of 67 years." In November 1582, therefore, she would be of the age of twenty-six. This disparity of years between Shakspere and his wife has been, we think, somewhat too much dwelt upon. Malone holds that "such a disproportion of age seldom fails at a subsequent period of life to be productive of unhappiness." Malone had, no doubt, in his mind the belief that Shakspere left his wife wholly dependent upon her children,—a belief of which we have intimated the utter groundlessness, and to which we shall advert when we have to notice his Will. He suggests that in the Midsummer Night's Dream this disproportion is alluded to, and he quotes a speech of Lysander in Act I. Scene I., of that play, not however giving the comment of Hermia upon it. The lines in the original stand thus:—

> "*Lys.* Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
> Could ever hear by tale or history,
> The course of true love never did run smooth:
> But either it was different in blood;—
> *Her.* O cross! too high to be enthrall'd to low!
> *Lys.* Or else *misgraffed, in respect of years*;—
> *Her.* O spite! too old to be engag'd to young!
> *Lys.* Or else it stood upon the choice of friends;—
> *Her.* O hell! to choose love by another's eye!
> *Lys.* Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
> War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it."

Difference in blood, disparity of years, the choosing of friends, are opposed to sympathy in choice. But was Shakspere's own case such as he would bear in mind in making Hermia exclaim, "O spite! *too old* to be engag'd to *young!*"? The passage was in all probability written about ten years after his marriage, when his wife would still be in the prime of womanhood. When Mr. de Quincey, therefore, connects the saying of Parson Evans with Shakspere's early love,—"I like not when a woman has a great peard,"—he scarcely does justice to his own powers of observation and his book-experience. The history of the most imaginative minds, probably of most men of great ability, would show that in the first loves, and in the early marriages, of this class, the choice has generally fallen upon women older than themselves, and this without any reference to interested motives. But Mr. de Quincey holds that Shakspere, "looking back on this part of his youthful history from his maturest years, breathes forth pathetic counsels against the errors into which his own inexperience had been ensnared. The disparity of years between himself and his wife he notices in a beautiful scene of the Twelfth Night."* In this scene Viola, disguised as a page, a very boy, one of whom it is said—

* Life of Shakspeare in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

"For they shall yet belie thy happy years
That say thou art a man,"—

is pressed by the Duke to own that his eye "hath stay'd upon some favour." Viola, who is enamoured of the Duke, punningly replies,—"A little, by your favour;" and being still pressed to describe the "kind of woman," she says, of the Duke's "complexion" and the Duke's "years." Any one who in the stage representation of the Duke should do otherwise than make him a grave man of thirty-five or forty, a staid and dignified man, would not present Shakspere's whole conception of the character. There would be a difference of twenty years between him and Viola. No wonder, then, that the poet should make the Duke dramatically exclaim,—

"*Too old, by Heaven!* Let still the woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart."

And wherefore?—

"For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are."

The pathetic counsels, therefore, which Shakspere is here supposed to breathe in his maturer years, have reference only to his own giddy and unfirm fancies. We are of opinion, as we have before stated with regard to this matter, that, upon the general principle upon which Shakspere subjects his conception of what is individually true to what is universally true, he would have rejected instead of adopted whatever was peculiar in his own experience, if it had been emphatically recommended to his adoption through the medium of his self-consciousness. Shakspere wrote these lines at a time of life (about 1602) when a slight disparity of years between himself and his wife would have been a very poor apology to his own conscience that his affection could not hold the bent; and it certainly does happen, as a singular contradiction to his supposed "earnestness in pressing the point as to the *inverted* disparity of years, which indicates pretty clearly an appeal to the lessons of his personal experience,"* that at this precise period he should have retired from his constant attendance upon the stage, purchasing land in his native place, and thus seeking in all probability the more constant companionship of that object of his early choice of whom he is thus supposed to have expressed his distaste. It appears to us that this is a tolerably convincing proof that his affections could hold the bent, however he might dramatically and poetically have said,

"Then let thy love be younger than thyself,
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent:
For women are as roses; whose fair flower,
Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour."

The season is not the most inviting for a journey on horseback of more than

* Life in 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

thirty miles, and yet William Shakspere, with two youthful friends, must ride to Worcester. The families of Shakspere and of Hathaway are naturally desirous that the sanction of the Church should be given within the customary period to the alliance which their children have formed. They are reverential observers of old customs; and their recollections of the practice of all who went before them show that the marriage, commenced by the troth-plight, ought not to be postponed too long. Convenience ought to yield to propriety; and Christmas must see the young housekeepers well settled. A licence must be procured from the Bishop's Court at Worcester. Fulk Sandells and John Rychardson, the companions of young Shakspere, substantial yeomen, will cheerfully be his bondsmen. Though *he* is a minor, and cannot join in the bond, they know that he will faithfully perform what he undertakes; and that their forty pounds are in no peril. They all well know the condition of such a bond. There is no pre-contract; no affinity between the betrothed; William has the consent of Anne's friends. They desire to be married with *once* asking of the banns; not an uncommon case, or the court would not grant such a licence. They desire not to avoid the publicity of banns; but they seek a licence for one publication, for their happiness has made them forget the lapse of time: the betrothment was binding indeed for ever upon true hearts, but the marriage will bless the contract, and make it irrevocable in its sanctity. And thus the three friends, after tender adieus, and many lingerings upon the threshold of the cottage at Shottery, mount their horses, and take the way to Worcester.

Fulk Sandells and John Rychardson (as the marks to the marriage-bond testify) were not lettered persons. But, nevertheless, they might have been very welcome companions to William Shakspere. The non-ability to write did not necessarily imply that their minds had not received a certain degree of cultivation. To *him*, who drew his wondrous knowledge out of every source —books, conversation, observation of character—no society could be wholly uninteresting. His genial nature would find objects of sympathy in the commonest mind. That he was a favourite amongst his own class it is impossible to doubt. His mental superiority would be too great to be displayed in any assumption; his kindliness of nature would knit him to every heart that was capable of affection — and what heart is not? Unintelligible would he be, no doubt, to many; but, as far as it is possible to conceive of his character, he would be wholly remote from that waywardness which has been considered the attribute of genius—neither moping, nor shy, nor petulant, nor proud; affecting no misanthropy, no indifference to the joys and sorrows of those around him; and certainly despising the fashion through which

> "Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,
> Only for wantonness." *

Assuredly the intellect of Shakspere was the most *healthful* ever bestowed upon man; and that was one cause of its unapproachable greatness. The soundest

* King John, Act IV., Scene I.

judgment was in combination with the highest fancy. With such friends, then, as Fulk Sandells and John Rychardson, would this young man be as free and as gladsome as if they were as equal in their minds as in their worldly circumstances. To a certain extent he would doubtless take the lead; he must of necessity have been the readiest in all discourse in his own circle;—the unconscious instructor of his companions; one that even age would listen to with reverence. To the young he would have been as a spirit of gladness lighted upon the earth, to make everything more bright and beautiful amidst which he walked. A sharp gallop over Bardon Hill shakes off the cold of the grey morning; and as the sun shoots a sudden gleam over a reach of the Avon, the young poet warms up into a burst of merriment which brings his friends in a moment to his side. He is full of animation. All the natural objects around furnish him with a theme. The lapwing screams, and he has a story to tell which is not the less enjoyed by his hearers because Ovid had told it before him; a hare runs towards them on the road, and he has a laugh for the superstition that ill-luck is boded—mingled with a remark, which is more for himself than his listeners, that "there is more in this world than is known to our philosophy." They hold their course gallantly on through Bidford and Salford; pausing a moment to look upon that fine old monastic house, which has become deserted since the dissolution of the abbeys. There were once state and

[Nunnery at Salford.]

wealth within its walls. Its tenants are scattered or perished: and if some solitary nun shall still endure, she will at last find a resting-place amongst the poorest—no requiem will be sung for her, such as she has heard sung for her sisters.

[Pershore.]

They rest for an hour or two at Evesham. Well known is that interesting town to William Shakspere; and he has many traditions connected with its ruined abbey, which have a deep interest even for those who look not upon such matters with the spirit of poetical reverence. Onwards again they ride through the beautiful vale, unequalled in its picturesque fertility. As they catch the first glimpse of the bold Malvern hills the young poet's eye is lighted up with many thoughts of the vast and wonderful of nature; for, to the inhabitants of a level and cultivated country even the slightest character of mountainous scenery brings a sense of the sublime. Nearer and nearer they approach these hills, and still they are indistinct, though apparently lifted to the clouds; and he watches that blue haze which hangs around them, as if in their solitudes there was something to be found more satisfying than in the pent-up plains. Pershore is reached; a magnificent work, like Evesham, made desolate by changes of opinion, urged on by violence and rapacity. The spires and towers of Worcester are soon in view. An hospitable inn there receives them. They are weary; and their business is deferred to the morrow. The morning comes; and the young men are surprised at the readiness of the official persons to promote their object. The requisite formalities are soon accomplished. The morning is passed in looking over the wonders of that interesting city—rich in monuments of the past which time and policy have spared. The evening sees the travellers on their way homeward. Sunday comes; and the banns *are* once asked. On Monday is the wedding.

It is scarcely necessary to point out to our readers that the view we have taken presupposes that the licence for matrimony, obtained from the Consistorial Court at Worcester, was a permission sought for under no extraordinary circumstances;—still less that the young man who was about to marry was compelled to urge on the marriage as a consequence of previous imprudence. We believe, on the contrary, that the course pursued was strictly in accordance with the customs of the time, and of the class, to which Shakspere belonged. The espousals before witnesses, we have no doubt, were then considered as constituting a valid marriage, if followed up within a limited time by the marriage of the Church. However the Reformed Church might have endeavoured to abrogate this practice, it was unquestionably the ancient habit of the people. It was derived from the Roman law, the foundation of many of our institutions. It prevailed for a long period without offence. It still prevails in the Lutheran Church. We are not to judge of the customs of those days by our own, especially if our inferences have the effect of imputing criminality where the most perfect innocence existed.*

* See Note on the Marriage-Licence.

[Worcester Cathedral.]

NOTE ON CHRISTENING CUSTOMS.

Howes, in his 'Continuation of Stow's Chronicle,' has this passage: "At this time (the first year of Queen Elizabeth), and for many years before, it was not the use and custom, as now it is (1631), for godfathers and godmothers generally to give plate at the baptism of children (as spoons, cups, and such like), but only to give christening shirts, with little bands and cuffs wrought either with silk or blue thread; the best of them for chief persons were edged with a small lace of black silk and gold, the highest price of which for great men's children was seldom above a noble, and the common sort two, three, or four and five shillings a-piece." Most of our readers are probably familiar with the story of Shakspere's own present as a godfather to the son of Ben Jonson. It is found in a manuscript in the British Museum, bearing the title of 'Merry Passages and Jests,' compiled by Sir Nicholas Lestrange. Such parts of this manuscript as are fit for publication, with other selections, have been published by the Camden Society in a little volume entitled 'Anecdotes and Traditions.' We would give this story if it were only to show our respect to Mr. Thoms, the editor of the volume, who has our sympathy when in his *l'envoy* he pleasantly says, "Go forth, my little book. Thou wilt, I know, find some friendly hands outstretched to give thee welcome. Yet, peradventure thou mayest meet also with unfriendly frowns—kindly meant, but hard to bear withal—signs of disapproval from good men and true, amongst whom it is the orthodox opinion that, as antiquarian matters are as old as the desert, they should be made as dry." The anecdote, in the orthography of the original, is as follows: "Shake-speare was god-father to one of Ben Jonson's children, and after the christ'ning, being in a deepe study, Jonson came to cheere him up, and ask't him why he was so melancholy? 'No, faith, Ben' (says he), 'not I, but I have been considering a great while what should be the fittest gift for me to bestow upon my god-child, and I have resolv'd at last.' 'I pr'y the, what?' sayes he. 'I' faith, Ben, I'le e'en give him a douzen good Lattin Spoones, and thou shalt translate them.'

NOTE ON SHAKSPERE'S MARRIAGE-LICENCE.

The following is a copy of the document in the Consistorial Court of Worcester, which was first published by Mr. Wheler in 1836, having been previously discovered by Sir R. Phillips. It consists of a bond to the officers of the Ecclesiastical Court, in which Fulk Sandells, of the county of Warwick, farmer, and John Rychardson, of the same place, farmer, are bound in the sum of forty pounds, &c. It is dated the 28th day of November, in the 25th year of Elizabeth (1582):—

"Novint univsi p psentes nos Fulcone Sandells de Stratford in Comit Warwic agricolam et Johem Rychardson ibm agricola teneri et firmiter obligari Rico Cosin gnoso et Robto Warmstry notario pno in quadraginta libris bone et legalis monete Angliæ solvend eisdem Rico et Robto hered execut vel assignat suis ad quam quidem soluconem bene et fidelr faiend obligam nos et utrq nrm p se pro toto et in solid hæred executor et administrator nros firmiter p ptes sigillis nris sigillat. Dat 28 die Nove Anno Regni Dne nre Eliz Dei gratia Anglie Franc et Hibnie Regine Fidei Defensor &c. 25°.

"The condicon of this obligacon ys suche, that if hereafter there shall not appere any lawfull lett or impediment by reason of any p contract or affinitie, or by any other lawful meanes whatsoev, but that Willm Shagspere on thone ptie, and Anne Hathwey, of Stratford, in the Dioces of

Worcester, maiden, may lawfully solemnize m̄riony, and in the same afterwards remaine and continew like man and wife, according unto the laws in that case provided; and moreov̄, if there be not at this p̄sent time any action, suit, quarrel, or demand, moved or depending before any iudge ecclesiastical or temporall for and concerning any suche lawfull lett or impediment. And moreov̄, if the said Willm̄ Shagspere do not p̄ceed to solemnizac̄on of marriadg with the said Ann Hathwey without the consent of hir frinds. And also if the said Willm̄ do upon his own p̄per costs and expences defend and save harmles the Right Rev̄end Father in God Lord John Bushop of Worcester and his offycers, for licensing them, the said Willm̄ and Anne, to be maried together wth once asking of the bannes of m̄riony betwene them and for alle other causes wch may ensue by reason or occasion thereof, that then the said obligac̄on to be voyd and of none effect, or else to stand and abide in fulle force and vertue"

In the 'Life of Shakspeare' by Mr. de Quincey the following observations are appended to an abridgment of the Marriage-Licence. The view thus taken is entirely opposed to our own, principally because it goes on to assume that the marriage of the young poet was unhappy—that his wife had not his respect—and this unhappiness drove him from Stratford. All this appears to us to be gratuitous assumption, and altogether inconsistent with this undeniable fact, that Shakspere is especially the poet who has done justice to the purity and innocence of the female character. It is not, we think, to be lightly inferred that his own peculiar experience would have offered him an example throughout his life of the opposite qualities. It would be unfair, however, not to give the opinion which is thus opposed to our own:—

"What are we to think of this document? Trepidation and anxiety are written upon its face. The parties are not to be married by a special licence, not even by an ordinary licence; in that case no proclamation of banns, no public asking at all, would have been requisite. Economical scruples are consulted, and yet the regular movement of the marriage 'through the bell-ropes' is disturbed. Economy, which retards the marriage, is here evidently in collision with some opposite principle which precipitates it. How is all this to be explained? Much light is afforded by the date when illustrated by another document. The bond bears date on the 28th day of November, in the 25th year of our lady the queen, that is, in 1582. Now, the baptism of Shakspeare's eldest child, Susanna, is registered on the 26th of May in the year following. * * * * Strange it is, that, whilst all biographers have worked with so much zeal upon the most barren dates or most baseless traditions in the great poet's life, realising in a manner the chimeras of Laputa, and endeavouring 'to extract sunbeams from cucumbers,' such a story with regard to such an event, no fiction of village scandal, but involved in legal documents,—a story so significant and so eloquent to the intelligent,—should formerly have been dismissed without notice of any kind; and even now, after the discovery of 1836, with nothing beyond a slight conjectural insinuation. For our parts, we should have been the last among the biographers to unearth any forgotten scandal. * * * * But in this case there seems to have been something more in motion than passion or the ardour of youth. 'I like not,' says Parson Evans (alluding to Falstaff in masquerade), 'I like not when a woman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under her muffler.' Neither do we like the spectacle of a mature young woman, five years past her majority, wearing the semblance of having been led astray by a boy who had still two years and a half to run of his minority."

[Palace of Woodstock.]

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST RIDE TO LONDON.

"This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess about eighteen, and was an actor at one of the playhouses, and did act exceedingly well. Now Ben Jonson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor. He began early to make Essays at Dramatic Poetry, which at that time was very low, and his plays took well." So writes honest Aubrey, in the year 1680, in his 'Minutes of Lives' addressed to his "worthy friend, Mr. Anthony à Wood, Antiquary of Oxford." Of the value of Aubrey's evidence we may form some opinion from his own statement to his friend:—"'T is a task that I never thought to have undertaken till you imposed it upon me, saying that I was fit for it by reason of my general acquaintance, having now not only lived above half a century of years in the world, but have also been much tumbled up and down in it; which hath made me so well known. Besides the modern advantage of coffeehouses in this great city, before which men knew not how to be acquainted but with their own relations or societies, I

might add that I come of a longævous race, by which means I have wipea some feathers off the wings of time for several generations, which does reach high."* It must not be forgotten that Aubrey's account of Shakspere, brief and imperfect as it is, is the earliest known to exist. Rowe's 'Life' was not published till 1707; and although he states that he must own a particular obligation to Betterton, the actor, for the most considerable part of the passages relating to this life —"his veneration for the memory of Shakspeare having engaged him to make a journey into Warwickshire on purpose to gather up what remains he could of a name for which he had so great a veneration"—we have no assistance in fixing the date of Betterton's inquiries. Betterton was born in 1635. From the Restoration, until his retirement from the stage, about 1700, he was the most deservedly popular actor of his time; "such an actor," says 'The Tatler,' "as ought to be recorded with the same respect as Roscius among the Romans." He died in 1710; and, looking at his busy life, it is probable that he did not make this journey into Warwickshire until after his retirement from the theatre. Had he set about these inquiries earlier, there can be little doubt that the 'Life' by Rowe would have contained more precise and satisfactory information, if not fewer idle tales. Shakspere's sister was alive in 1646; his eldest daughter, Mrs. Hall, in 1649; his second daughter, Mrs. Quiney, in 1662; and his grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, in 1670. The information which might be collected in Warwickshire, after the death of Shakspere's lineal descendants, would necessarily be mixed up with traditions, having for the most part some foundation, but coloured and distorted by that general love of the marvellous which too often hides the fact itself in the inference from it. Thus, Shakspere's father might have sold his own meat, as the landowners of his time are reproached by Harrison for doing, and yet in no proper sense of the word have been a butcher. Thus, the supposition that the poet had intended to satirize the Lucy family, in an allusion to their arms, might have suggested that there was a grudge between him and the knight; and what so likely a subject of dispute as the killing of venison? the tradition might have been exact as to the dispute; but the laws of another century could alone have suggested that the quarrel would compel the poet to fly the country. Aubrey's story of Shakspere's coming to London is a simple and natural one, without a single marvellous circumstance about it:—"This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London." This, the elder story, appears to us to have much greater verisimilitude than the later:—"He was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time, and shelter himself in London." Aubrey who has picked up all the gossip "of coffeehouses in this great city," hears no word of Rowe's story which would certainly have been handed down amongst the traditions of the theatre to Davenant and Shadwell, from whom he does hear something:—"I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Shadwell (who is counted the best comedian we have now) say, that he had a most prodigious wit." Neither does he say, nor indeed any one else till two centuries and a quarter after Shakspere is

* This letter, which accompanies the 'Lives,' is dated London, June 15, 1680.

May 26 Susanna daughter to William Shakspere

February 2 Hammet & Judeth sonne & daughter to William Shakspere

dead, that, "after four years' conjugal discord, he would resolve upon that plan of solitary emigration to the metropolis, which, at the same time that it released him from the humiliation of domestic feuds, succeeded so splendidly for his worldly prosperity, and with a train of circumstances so vast for all future ages."* It is certainly a singular vocation for a writer of genius to bury the legendary scandals of the days of Rowe, for the sake of exhuming a new scandal, which cannot be received at all without the belief that the circumstance must have had a permanent and most evil influence upon the mind of the unhappy man who thus cowardly and ignominiously is held to have severed himself from his duty as a husband and a father. We cannot trace the evil influence, and therefore we reject the scandal. It has not even the slightest support from the weakest tradition. It is founded upon an imperfect comparison of two documents, judging of the habits of that period by those of our own day; supported by quotations from a dramatist of whom it would be difficult to affirm that he ever wrote a line which had strict reference to his own feelings and circumstances, and whose intellect in his dramas went so completely out of itself that it almost realizes the description of the soul in its first and pure nature—that it "hath no idiosyncrasies; that is, hath no proper natural inclinations which are not competent to others of the same kind and condition."†

In the baptismal register of the parish of Stratford, for the year 1583 is the entry of the birth of Susanna. This record necessarily implies the residence of the wife of William Shakspere in the parish of Stratford. Did he himself continue to reside in this parish? There is no evidence of his residence. His name appears in no suit in the Bailiff's Court at this period. He fills no municipal office such as his father had filled before him. But his wife continues to reside in the native place of her husband, surrounded by his relations and her own. His father and his mother no doubt watch with anxious solicitude over the fortunes of their first son. He has a brother, Gilbert, seventeen years of age, and a sister of fourteen. His brother Richard is nine years of age; but Edmund is young enough to be the playmate of his little Susanna. In 1585 there is another entry in the parochial register, the birth of a son and a daughter:—

* Encyclopædia Britannica.

† Enquiry into the Opinion of the Eastern Sages concerning the Præ-existence of Souls. By the Rev. Joseph Glanvil.

William Shakspere has now nearly attained his majority. While he is yet a minor he is the father of three children. The circumstance of his minority may perhaps account for the absence of his name from all records of court-leet, or bailiff's court, or common-hall. He was neither a constable, nor an ale-conner, nor an overseer, nor a jury-man, because he was a minor. We cannot affirm that he did not leave Stratford before his minority expired; but it is to be inferred, that, if he had continued to reside at Stratford after he was legally of age, we should have found traces of his residence in the records of the town. If his residence were out of the borough, as we have supposed his father's to have been at this period, some trace would yet have been found of him, in all likelihood, within the parish. Just before the termination of his minority we have an undeniable record that he was a second time a father within the parish. It is at this period, then, that we would place his removal from Stratford; his flight, according to the old legend; his solitary emigration, his unamiable separation from his family, according to the new discovery. That his emigration was even solitary we have not a tittle of evidence. The one fact we know with reference to Shakspere's domestic arrangements in London is this: that as early as 1596 he was the occupier of a house in Southwark. "From a paper now before me, which formerly belonged to Edward Alleyn, the player, our poet appears to have lived in Southwark near the Bear-garden, in 1596."* Malone does not describe this paper; but Mr. Collier found it at Dulwich College, and it thence appears that the name of "Mr. Shaksper' was in a list of "Inhabitants of Sowtherk as have complaned, this — of Jully, 1596." It is immaterial to know of what Shakspere complained, in company with "Wilson the piper," and sundry others. The neighbourhood does not seem to have been a very select one, if we may judge from another name in this list. We cannot affirm that Shakspere was the solitary occupier of this house in Southwark. Chalmers says, "it can admit of neither controversy nor doubt, that Shakspere in very early life settled in a family way where he was bred. Where he thus settled, he probably resolved that his wife and family should remain through life; although he himself made frequent excursions to London, the scene of his profit, and the theatre of his fame." Mr. Hunter has discovered a document which shews that "William Shakespeare was, in 1598, assessed in a large sum to a subsidy upon the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate. He was assessed, also, in the Liberty of the Clink, Southwark, in 1609; but whether for a dwelling-house, or for his property in the Globe, is not evident. His occupation as an actor both at the Blackfriars and the Globe, the one a winter, the other a summer theatre, continued till 1603 or 1604. His interest as a proprietor of both theatres existed in all probability till 1612. In 1597 Shakspere became the purchaser of the largest house in Stratford, and he resided there with his family till the time of his death in 1616. Many circumstances show that his interests and affections were always connected with the place of his birth.

William Shakspere, "being inclined naturally to poetry and acting," naturally became a poet and an actor. He would become a poet, without any

* Malone, Inquiry, &c., p. 215.

impelling circumstances not necessarily arising out of his own condition. "He began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low." Aubrey's account of his early poetical efforts is an intelligible and consistent account. Shakspere was familiar with the existing state of dramatic poetry, through his acquaintance with the stage in the visits or various companies of actors to Stratford. We have shown what that condition was in 1580. It was not much improved in 1585. In the previous year there had been three sets of players at Stratford, remunerated for their performances out of the public purse of the borough. These were the players of "my Lord of Oxford," the Earl of Warwick, and the Earl of Essex. In 1585 we have no record of players in the borough. In 1586 there is only one performance paid for by the Corporation. But in 1587 the Queen's players, for the first time, make their appearance in that town; and their performances are rewarded at a much higher rate than those of any previous company. Two years after this, that is in 1589, we have undeniable evidence that Shakspere had not only a casual engagement, was not only a salaried servant, as many players were, but was a shareholder in this very Queen's company, with other shareholders below him in the list. The fair inference is, that he did not at once jump into his position; and even that two years before, when the Queen's players visited Stratford for the first time, there was some especial cause for their visit; and that the cause is easily found in the circumstance that one of their company was a native of Stratford, with influential friends and connexions there, and that he was not ashamed to exhibit his vocation amongst the companions of his youth. Rowe says that, after having settled in the world in a family manner, and continued in this kind of settlement for some time, the extravagance of which he was guilty in robbing Sir Thomas Lucy's park obliged him to leave his business and family. He could not have so left, even according to the circumstances which were known to Rowe, till after the birth of his son and daughter in 1585. But the story goes on:—"It is at this time, and upon this accident, that he is said to have made his first acquaintance in the playhouse. He was received into the company then in being, at first in a very mean rank; but his admirable wit, and the natural turn of it to the stage, soon distinguished him, if not as an extraordinary actor, yet as an excellent writer." Six years after the time of Rowe the story assumed a more circumstantial shape, as far as regards the *mean rank* which Shakspere filled in his early connexion with the theatre. Dr. Johnson adds one passage to the 'Life,' which he says "Mr. Pope related, as communicated to him by Mr. Rowe." It is so remarkable an anecdote that it is somewhat surprising that Rowe did not himself add it to his own meagre account:—

"In the time of Elizabeth, coaches being yet uncommon, and hired coaches not at all in use, those who were too proud, too tender, or too idle to walk, went on horseback to any distant business or diversion. Many came on horseback to the play; and when Shakspere fled to London from the terror of a criminal prosecution, his first expedient was to wait at the door of the playhouse, and hold the horses of those that had no servants, that they might be

ready again after the performance. In this office he became so conspicuous for his care and readiness, that in a short time every man as he alighted called for Will Shakspeare, and scarcely any other waiter was trusted with a horse while Will Shakspeare could be had. This was the first dawn of better fortune. Shakspeare, finding more horses put into his hand than he could hold, hired boys to wait under his inspection, who, when Will Shakspeare was summoned, were immediately to present themselves,—'I am Shakspeare's boy, Sir.' In time, Shakspeare found higher employment; but as long as the practice of riding to the playhouse continued, the waiters that held the horses retained the appellation of Shakspeare's boys."

Steevens has attempted to impugn the credibility of this anecdote by saying, —"That it was once the general custom to ride on horseback to the play I am yet to learn. The most popular of the theatres were on the Bankside; and we are told by the satirical pamphleteers of that time that the usual mode of conveyance to these places of amusement was by water, but not a single writer so much as hints at the custom of riding to them, or at the practice of having horses held during the hours of exhibition." Steevens is here in error; he has a vague notion—which is still persevered in with singular obstinacy, even by those who have now the means of knowing that Shakspere had acquired property in the chief theatre in 1589—that the great dramatic poet had felt no inspiration till he was about eight-and-twenty, and that, therefore, his connexion with the theatre began in the palmy days of the Globe on the Bankside —a theatre not built till 1593. To the earlier theatres, if they were frequented by the gallants of the Court, they would have gone on horses. They did so go, as we learn from Dekker, long after the Bankside theatres were established. The story first appeared in a book entitled 'The Lives of the Poets,' considered to be the work of Theophilus Cibber, but said to be written by a Scotchman of the name of Shiels, who was an amanuensis of Dr. Johnson. Shiels had certainly some hand in the book; and there we find that Davenant told the anecdote to Betterton, who communicated it to Rowe, who told it to Pope, who told it to Dr. Newton. Improbable as the story is as it now stands, there may be a scintillation of truth in it, as in most traditions. It is by no means impossible that the Blackfriars Theatre might have had Shakspere's boys to hold horses, but not Shakspere himself. As a proprietor of the theatre, Shakspere might sagaciously perceive that its interest would be promoted by the readiest accommodation being offered to its visitors; and further, with that worldly adroitness which, in him, was not incompatible with the exercise of the highest genius, he might have derived an individual profit by employing servants to perform this office. In an age when horse-stealing was one of the commonest occurrences, it would be a guarantee for the safe charge of the horses that they were committed to the care of the agents of one then well known in the world, —an actor, a writer, a proprietor of the theatre. Such an association with the author of Hamlet must sound most anti-poetical; but the fact is scarcely less prosaic that the same wondrous man, about the period when he wrote

Macbeth, had an action for debt in the Bailiff's Court at Stratford, to recover thirty-five shillings and tenpence for corn by him sold and delivered.

Familiar, then, with theatrical exhibitions, such as they were, from his earliest youth, and with a genius so essentially dramatic that all other writers that the world has seen have never approached him in his power of going out of himself, it is inconsistent with probability that he should not have attempted some dramatic composition at an early age. The theory that he was first employed in repairing the plays of others we hold to be altogether untenable; supported only by a very narrow view of the great essentials to a dramatic work, and by verbal criticism, which, when carefully examined, utterly fails even in its own petty assumptions.* There can be no doubt that the three Parts of Henry VI. belong to the early stage. We believe them to be wholly and absolutely the early work of Shakspere. But we do not necessarily hold that they were his earliest work; for the proof is so absolute of the continual improvements and elaborations which he made in his best productions, that it would be difficult to say that some of the plays which have the most finished air, but of which there were no early editions, may not be founded upon very youthful compositions. Others may have wholly perished; thrown aside after a season; never printed; and neglected by their author, to whom new inventions would be easier than remodellings of pieces probably composed upon a false theory of art. For it is too much to imagine that his first productions would be wholly untainted by the taste of the period. Some might have been weak delineations of life and character, overloaded with mythological conceits and pastoral affectations, like the plays of Lyly, which were the Court fashion before 1590. Others might have been prompted by the false ambition to produce effect, which is the characteristic of Locrine, and partially so of Titus Andronicus. But of one thing we may be sure—that there would be no want of power even in his first productions; that real poetry would have gushed out of the bombast, and true wit sparkled amidst the conceits. His first plays would, we think, fall in with the prevailing desire of the people to learn the history of their country through the stage. If so, they would certainly not exhibit the feebleness of some of these performances which were popular about the period of which we are now speaking, and which continued to be popular even after he had most successfully undertaken

> To raise our ancient sovereigns from their hearse."

The door of the theatre was not a difficult one for him to enter. It is a singular fact, that several of the most eminent actors of this very period are held to have been his immediate neighbours. The petition to the Privy Council, which has proved that Shakspere was a sharer in the Blackfriars playhouse in 1589, contains the names of sixteen shareholders, he being the twelfth on the list. The head of the Company was James Burbage; the second, Richard Burbage his son. Malone suspected that both John Heminge, one of the

* See our Essay on the Three Parts of Henry VI. and Richard III.

editors of Shakspere's Collected Works, and Richard Burbage, "were Shakspere's countrymen, and that Heminge was born at Shottery." His conjecture with regard to Heminge was founded upon entries in the baptismal register of Stratford, which show that there was a John Heminge at Shottery in 1567, and a Richard Heminge in 1570. Mr. Collier has shewn that a John Burbadge was bailiff of Stratford in 1555; and that many of the same name were residents in Warwickshire. But Mr. Hunter believes that Richard Burbage was a native of London. A letter addressed by Lord Southampton to Lord Ellesmere in 1608, introducing Burbage and Shakspere to ask protection of that nobleman, then Lord Chancellor, against some threatened molestation from the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London, says, "they are both of one county, and indeed almost of one town." This would be decisive, had some doubts not been thrown upon the authenticity of this document. We do not therefore rely upon the assumption tha William Shakspere and Richard Burbage were originally neighbours. But from the visits of the Queen's players to Stratford, Shakspere might have made friends with Burbage and Heminge, and have seen that the profession of an actor, however disgraced by some men of vicious manners, performing in the inn-yards and smaller theatres of London, numbered amongst its members men of correct lives and honourable character, Even the enemy of plays and players, Stephen Gosson, had been compelled to acknowledge this: "It is well known that some of them are sober, discreet, properly learned, honest householders, and citizens well thought on among their neighbours at home." * It was a lucrative profession, too; especially to those who had the honour of being the Queen's Servants. Their theatre was frequented by persons of rank and fortune; the prices of admission were high; they were called upon not unfrequently to present their performances before the Queen herself, and their reward was a royal one. The object thus offered to the ambition of a young man, conscious of his own powers, would be glittering enough to induce him, not very unwillingly, to quit the tranquil security of his native home. But we inverse the usual belief in this matter. We think that Shakspere became an actor because he was a dramatic writer, and not a dramatic writer because he was an actor. He very quickly made his way to wealth and reputation, not so much by a handsome person and pleasing manners, as by that genius which left all other competitors far behind him in the race of dramatic composition; and by that prudence which taught him to combine the exercise of his extraordinary powers with a constant reference to the course of life he had chosen, not lowering his art for the advancement of his fortune, but achieving his fortune in showing what mighty things might be accomplished by his art.

There is a subject, however, which we are now called upon to examine, which may have had a material influence upon the determination of Shakspere to throw himself upon the wide and perilous sea of London dramatic society. We have uniformly contended against the assertion that the poverty of John Shakspere prevented him giving his son a grammar-school education. We believe that all the supposed evidences of that poverty, at the period of Shakspere's boyhood, are

* 'School of Abuse,' 1579.

extremely vague and contradictory.* But, on the other hand, it appears to us more than probable that after William Shakspere had the expenses of a family to meet, there were changes, and very natural ones, in the worldly position of his father, and consequently of his own, which might have rendered it necessary that the son should abandon the tranquil course of a rural life which he probably contemplated when he married, and make a strenuous and a noble exertion for independence, in a career which his peculiar genius opened to him. We will first state the facts which appear to bear upon the supposed difficulties of John Shakspere, about the period when William may be held to have joined Burbage's company in London—facts which are far from indicating any thing like ruin, but which exhibit some involvements and uneasiness.

In 1578 John Shakspere mortgaged his property of Asbies, acquired by marriage. Four years before this he purchased two freehold houses in Stratford, which he always retained. In 1578, therefore, he wanted capital. In 1579 he sold an interest in some property at Snitterfield. But then, in 1580, he tendered the mortgage money to the mortgagee of the Asbies' estate, which was illegally refused, on the pretence that other money was owing. A Chancery suit was the consequence, which was undetermined in 1597. In an action for debt in the bailiff's court in 1586, the return of the serjeants-at-mace upon a warrant of distress against John Shakspere is, that he had nothing to distrain upon. It is held, therefore, that all the household gear was then gone. Is it not more credible that the family lived elsewhere? Mr. Hunter has discovered that a John Shakspere lived at Clifford, a pretty village near Stratford, in 1579, he being described in a will of 1583 as indebted to the estate of John Ashwell, of Stratford. His removal from Stratford borough as a resident, is corroborated by the fact that he was irregular in his attendance at the halls of the corporation, after 1578; and was finally, in 1586, removed from the body, for that he "doth not come to the halls when they be warned." And yet, as there were fines for non-attendance, as pointed out by Mr. Halliwell, there is some proof that he clung to the civic honours, even at a personal cost; though, from some cause, and that probably non-residence, he did not perform the civic duties. Lastly, he is returned in 1592, with other persons, as not attending church, and this remark is appended to a list of nine persons, in which is the name of "*Mr.* John Shackespere,"—"It is said that these last nine come not to church for fear of process for debt." If he had been residing in the borough it would have been quite unnecessary to execute the process in the sacred precincts;—he evidently lived and was occupied out of the borough. It is tolerably clear that the traffic of Henley Street, whether of wool, or skins, or carcases, was at an end. John Shakspere, the yeoman, was farming; and, like many other agriculturists, in all districts, and all times, was a sufferer from causes over which he had no control. There were peculiar circumstances at that period which, temporarily, would have materially affected his property.

In 1580 John Shakspere tendered the mortgage money for his wife's inheritance at Asbies. The property was rising in value;—the mortgagee would not give it up.

* See Book II. Chap. I.

He had taken possession, and had leased it, as we learn from the Chancery proceedings. He alleges, in 1597, that John Shakspere wanted to obtain possession, because the lease was expiring, "whereby a greater value is to be yearly raised." Other property was sold to obtain the means of making this tender. John Shakspere would probably have occupied his estate of Asbies, could he have obtained possession. But he was unlawfully kept out: and he became a tenant of some other land, in addition to what he held of his own. There was, at this particular period, a remarkable pressure upon proprietors and tenants who did not watchfully mark the effects of an increased abundance of money—a prodigious rise in the value of all commodities, through the greater supply of the precious metals. In "A Briefe Conceipte touching the Commonweale," already quoted,* there is, in the dialogue between the landowner, the husbandman, the merchant, the manufacturer, and the doctor of divinity, a complaint on the part of the landowner, which appears to offer a parallel case to that of John Shakspere:—"All of my sort—I mean all gentlemen—have great cause to complain, now that the prices of things are so risen of all hands, that you may better live after your degree than we; for you may and do raise the price of your wares as the prices of victuals and other necessaries do rise, and so cannot we so much; for though it be true, that of such lands as come to hands either by purchase or by determination and ending of such terms of years that I or my ancestors had granted them in time past, I do receive a better fine than of old was used, or enhance the rent thereof, being forced thereto for the charge of my household, that is so encreased over that it was; yet in all my lifetime I look not that the third part of my land shall come to my disposition, that I may enhance the rent of the same, but it shall be in men's holding either by leases or by copy granted before my time, and still continuing, and yet like to continue in the same state for the most part during my life, and percase my sons. * * * * * * We are forced therefore to minish the third part of our household, or to raise the third part of our revenues, and for that we cannot so do of our own lands that is already in the hands of other men, many of us are enforced to keep pieces of our own lands when they fall in our own possession, or to purchase some farm of other men's lands, and to store them with sheep or some other cattle, to help make up the decay of our revenues, and to maintain our old estate withal, and yet all is little enough."

In such a transition state, we may readily imagine John Shakspere to have been a sufferer. But his struggle was a short one. He may have owed debts he was unable to pay, and have gone through some seasons of difficulty, deriving small rents from his own lands, "in the hands of other men," and enforced to hold "some farm of other men's lands" at an advanced rent. Yet this is not ruin and degradation. He maintained his social position; and it is pleasant to imagine that his illustrious son devoted some portion of the first rewards of his labour to make the condition of his father easier in that time of general uneasiness and difficulty. In ten years prosperity brightened the homes of that family. The poet bought the best house in Stratford; the yeoman applied to the College of Arms for bearings that would

* Page 19.

exhibit his gentle lineage, and asserted that he was a man of landed substance, sufficient to uphold the pretension. But in the period of rapid changes in the value of property,—a transition which, from the time of Latimer, was producing the most remarkable effects on the social condition of all the people of England, pressing severely upon many, although it was affording the sure means of national progress, —it is more than probable that Shakspere's father gradually found himself in straitened circumstances. This change in his condition might have directed his son to a new course of life which might be entered upon without any large pecuniary means, and which offered to his ambition a fair field for the exercise of his peculiar genius. There was probably a combination of necessity and of choice which gave us "Hamlet" and "Lear." If William Shakspere had remained at Stratford he would have been a poet—a greater, perhaps, than the author of "The Faery Queen;" but that species of literature which it was for him to build up, almost out of chaos, and to carry onward to a perfection beyond the excellence of any other age, might have been for him an "unweeded garden."

The two young men, Richard Burbage and William Shakspere, "both of one county, and indeed almost of one town," may be assumed, without any improbability, to have taken their way together towards London, on the occasion when one of them went forth for the first time from his native home, depressed at parting, but looking hopefully towards the issue of his adventure. There would be little said till long after the friends had crossed the great bridge at Stratford. The eyes of one would be frequently turned back to look upon the old spire. Thoughts which unquestionably have grown out of some such separation as this would involuntarily possess his soul:—

> "How heavy do I journey on the way,
> When what I seek,—my weary travel's end.—
> Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,
> 'Thus far the miles are measur'd from thy friend!'
> The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
> Plods dully on to bear that weight in me,
> As if by some instinct the wretch did know
> His rider lov'd not speed, being made from thee." *

The first stages of this journey would offer little interest to the travellers. Having passed Long Compton, and climbed the steep range of hills that divide Warwickshire from Oxfordshire, weary stretches of barren downs would present a novel contrast to the fertility of Shakspere's own county. But after a few miles the scene would change. A noble park would stretch out as far as the eye could reach—rich with venerable oaks and beeches, planted in the reign of Henry I.,—the famous park of Woodstock. The poet would be familiar with all the interesting associations of this place. Here was Rosamond Clifford secluded from the eyes of the world by her bold and accomplished royal lover. Here dwelt Edward III. Here, more interesting than either fact, Chaucer wrote some of his early poems—

* Sonnet 50.

"Within a lodge out of the way,
Beside a well in a forest." *

And here, when he retired from active life, he composed his immortal 'Canterbury Tales.' Here was the Lady Elizabeth a prisoner, almost dreading death, only a year or two before she ascended the throne. Here, "hearing upon a time out of her garden a certain milkmaid singing pleasantly, she wished herself to be a milkmaid, as she was; saying that her case was better, and life more merrier, than was hers in that state as she was." † The travellers assuredly visited the palace which a few years after Hentzner described as abounding in magnificence; and near a spring of the brightest water they would have viewed all that was left of the tomb of Rosamond, with her rhyming epitaph, the production, probably, of a later age:—

"Hic jacet in tumbâ Rosamundi non Rosamunda,
Non redolet sed olet, quæ redolere solet."

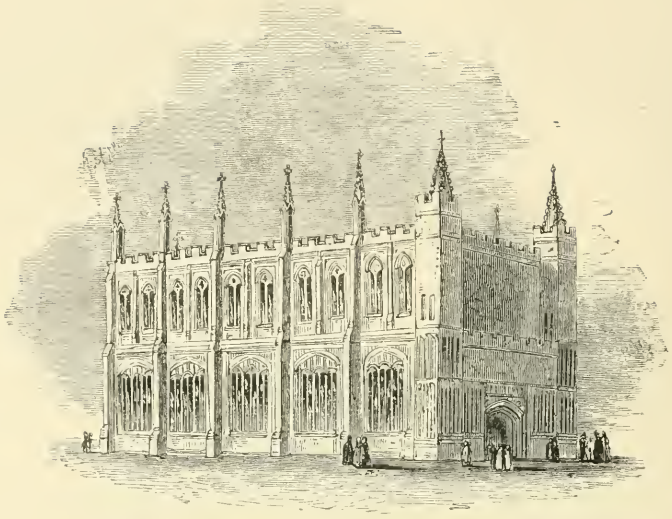
The earliest light of the next morning would see the companions on their way to Oxford; and an hour's riding would lodge them in the famous hostelry of the Corn Market, the Crown. Aubrey tells us that "Mr. William Shakespeare was wont to go into Warwickshire once a-year, and did commonly in his journey lie at this house in Oxon, where he was exceedingly respected." ‡ The poet's first journey may have determined his subsequent habit of resting at this house. It is no longer an inn. But one who possessed a true enthusiasm, Thomas Warton, described it in the last century in the belief "that Shakspeare's old hostelry at Oxford deserves no less respect than Chaucer's Tabard in Southwark." He says, "As to the Crown Inn, it still remains an inn, and is an old decayed house, but probably was once a principal inn in Oxford. It is directly in the road from Stratford to London. In a large upper room, which seems to have been a sort of hall for entertaining a large company, or for accommodating (as was the custom) different parties at once, there was a bow-window, with three pieces of excellent painted glass." We have ample materials for ascertaining what aspect Oxford presented for the first time to the eye of Shakspere. The ancient castle, according to Hentzner, was in ruins; but the elegance of its private buildings, and the magnificence of its public ones, filled this traveller with admiration. So noble a place, raised up entirely for the encouragement of learning, would excite in the young poet feelings that were strange and new. He had wept over the ruins of religious houses; but here was something left to give the assurance that there was a real barrier against the desolations of force and ignorance. A deep regret might pass through his mind that he had not availed himself of the opening which was presented to the humblest in the land, here to make himself a ripe and good scholar. Oxford was the patrimony of the people; and he, one of the people, had not claimed his birthright. He was set out upon a doubtful adventure; the persons with whom he was to be associated had no rank in society; they

* Chaucer's 'Dream. † Holinshed. ‡ Life of Davenant.

were to a certain extent despised; they were the servants of a luxurious court, and, what was sometimes worse, of a tasteless public. But, on the other hand, as he paused before Balliol College, he must have recollected what a fearful tragedy was there acted some thirty years before. Was he sure that the day of persecution for opinions was altogether past? Men were still disputing everywhere around him; and the slighter the differences between them the more violent their zeal. They were furious for or against certain ceremonial observances; so that they appeared to forget that the object of all devotional forms was to make the soul approach nearer to the Fountain of wisdom and

[Balliol College, in the sixteenth century.]

goodness, and that He could not be approached without love and charity. The spirit of love dwelt in the inmost heart of this young man. It was in after-time to diffuse itself over writings which entered the minds of the loftiest and the humblest, as an auxiliary to that higher teaching which is too often forgotten in the turmoil of the world. His intellect would at any rate be free in the course which was before him. Much of the knowledge that he had acquired up to this period was self-taught; but it was not the less full and accurate. He had ranged at his will over a multitude of books,—idle reading, no doubt, to the systematic and professional student; but, if weeds, weeds out of which he could extract honey. The subtile disputations,



Divinity Schools, in the sixteenth century.]

of the schools, as they were then conducted, were more calculated, as he had heard, to call forth a talent for sophistry than a love of truth. Falsehood might rest upon logic, for the perfect soundness of the conclusion might hide the rottenness of the premises. He entered the beautiful Divinity Schools; and there, too, he found that the understanding was more trained to dispute, than the whole intellectual being of man to reverence. He would pursue his own course with a cheerful spirit; nothing doubting that, whilst he worked out his individual happiness, he might still become an instrument of good to his fellow-men. And yet did the young man reverence Oxford; because he reverenced letters as opposed to illiteracy. He gave his testimony to the worth of Oxford at a distant day, when he held that the great glory of Wolsey was to have founded Christchurch:—

"He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one:
Exceeding wise, fair spoken, and persuading:
Lofty and sour to them that lov'd him not;
But to those men that sought him, sweet as summer.
And though he were unsatisfied in getting,
(Which was a sin), yet in bestowing, madam,
He was most princely: Ever witness for him
Those twins of learning that he rais'd in you,
Ipswich and Oxford! one of which fell with him,
Unwilling to outlive the good he did it;
The other, though unfinish'd, yet so famous,

So excellent in art, and still so rising,
That Christendom shall ever speak his virtue." *

The journey from Oxford to London must have occupied two days, in that age of bad roads and long miles. Harrison, in his 'Chapter on Thoroughfares' (1586), gives us the distances from town to town:—Oxford to Whatleie, 4 miles; Whatleie to Thetisford, 6; Thetisford to Stockingchurch, 5, Stockingchurch to East Wickham, 5; East Wickham to Baccansfield, 5; Baccansfield to Uxbridge, 7; Uxbridge to London, 15. Total, 47 miles. Our modern admeasurements give 54. Over this road, then, in many parts a picturesque one, would the two friends from Stratford take their course. They would fare well and cheaply on the road. Harrison tells us, "Each comer is sure to lie in clean sheets, wherein no man hath been lodged since they came from the laundress, or out of the water wherein they were last washed. If the traveller have a horse his bed doth cost him nothing, but if he go on foot he is sure to pay a penny for the same. But whether he be horseman or footman, if his chamber be once appointed he may carry the key with him, as of his own house, so long as he lodgeth there. If he lose aught whilst he abideth in the inn, the host is bound by a general custom to restore the damage, so that there is no greater security anywhere for travellers than in the greatest inns of England."

* Henry VIII., Act iv., Scene ii.

(Christchurch, in the sixteenth century.)

On the evening of the fourth day after their departure from home would the young wayfarers, accustomed to fatigue, reach London. They would see only fields and hedge-rows, leading to the hills of Hampstead and Highgate on the north of the road, and to Westminster on the south. They would be wholly in the country; with a long line of road before them, without a house, at the spot which now, although bearing the name of a lane—Park Lane—is one of the chosen seats of fashion. Here Burbage would point out to his companion the distant roofs of the Abbey and the Hall of Westminster; and nearer would stand St. James's Palace, a solitary and somewhat gloomy building. They

[Ancient View of St. James's and Westminster.]

would ride on through fields, till they came very near the village of St. Giles's. Here, turning from their easterly direction to the south, they would pass through meadows; with the herd quietly grazing under the evening sun in one enclosure, and the laundress collecting her bleached linen in another. They are now in St. Martin's Lane; and the hum of population begins to be heard. The inn in the Strand receives their horses, and they take a boat at Somerset Place. Then bursts upon the young stranger a full conception of the wealth and greatness of that city of which he has heard so much, and imagined so much more. Hundreds of boats are upon the river. Here and there a stately barge is rowed along, gay with streamers and rich liveries; and the sound of music is heard from its decks, and the sound is repeated from many a beauteous garden that skirts the water's edge. He looks back upon the cluster of noble buildings that form the

Palace of Westminster. York Place, and the spacious Savoy, bring their historical recollections to his mind. He looks eastward, and there is the famous Temple, and the Palace of Bridewell, and Baynard's Castle. Above all these rises up the majestic spire of Paul's. London Bridge, that wonder of the world, now shows its picturesque turrets and multitudinous arches; and in the distance is seen the Tower of London, full of grand and solemn associations. The boat rests at the Blackfriars. In a few minutes they are threading the narrow streets of the precinct; and a comfortable house affords the weary youths a cheerful welcome.

NOTE ON AUBREY'S 'LIFE OF SHAKSPERE.

AUBREY'S 'Life,' as we have mentioned, is the earliest connected account of Shakspere Brief as it is, it is full of curious and characteristic matter; made up of gossip, indeed, and evidently inaccurate in one or two particulars, but still valuable as reflecting the general notion of Shakspere's career entertained by his immediate successors, with whom Aubrey was familiar. Rowe's 'Life' comes later; and the facts are so mixed up with the critical opinions of his age, which uniformly desire to represent Shakspere as an uneducated man, that we cannot regard it as so genuine a production as Aubrey's tattle, in which he told what he had heard without much regard to the inferences to be drawn from his tale. It ought to be read entire, properly to judge of its credibility; and therefore we so present it to our readers:—

"Mr. William Shakespear was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick; his father was a butcher, and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours that when he was a boy he exercised his father's trade, but when he killed a calf he would do it in a high style, and make a speech. There was at that time another butcher's son in this town that was held not at all inferior to him for a natural wit, his acquaintance and coetanean, but died young. This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess, about 18, and was an actor at one of the playhouses, and did act exceedingly well. Now B. Jonson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor. He began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low, and his plays took well. He was a handsome, well-shaped man, very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit. The humour of . . . . . the constable, in A Midsummer-Night's Dream, he happened to take at Grendon,* in Bucks, which is the road from London to Stratford, and there was living that constable about 1642, when I first came to Oxon. Mr. Jos. Howe is of that parish, and knew him. Ben Jonson and he did gather humours of men daily wherever they came. One time as he was at the tavern at Stratford-upon-Avon, one Combes, an old rich usurer, was to be buried; he makes there this extemporary epitaph:—

> 'Ten in the hundred the devil allows,
> But Combes will have twelve, he swears and vows:
> If any one asks who lies in this tomb,
> "Ho!" quoth the devil, "'tis my John o' Combe."'

He was wont to go to his native country once a-year. I think I have been told that he left 2 or 300*l.* per annum there and thereabout to a sister. I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Shadwell (who is counted the best comedian we have now) say that he had a most prodigious wit, and did admire his natural parts beyond all other dramatical writers. He was wont to say that he never blotted out a line in his life; said Ben Jonson, 'I wish he had blotted out a thousand.' His comedies will remain wit as long as the English tongue is understood, for that he handles *mores hominum;* now our present writers reflect so much upon particular persons and coxcombities, that twenty years hence they will not be understood.

"Though, as Ben Jonson says of him, that he had but little Latin and less Greek, he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country." †

* "I think it was Midsummer night that he happened to lie there."
† From Mr. Beeston.

END OF BOOK I.

William Shakspere

A BIOGRAPHY

BOOK II

[A Play at the Blackfriars.]

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW PLAY.

Amongst those innumerable by-ways in London which are familiar to the hurried pedestrian, there is a well-known line of streets, or rather lanes, leading from the hill on which St. Paul's stands to the great thoroughfare of Blackfriars Bridge. The pavement is narrow, the carriage-way is often blocked up by contending carmen, the houses are mean; yet the whole district is full of interesting associations. We have scarcely turned out of Ludgate Street, under a narrow archway, when the antiquary may descry a large lump of the ancient

city wall embedded in the lath and plaster of a modern dwelling. A little farther, and we pass the Hall of the Apothecaries who have here, by dint of long and earnest struggle, raised their original shopkeeping vocation into a science. A little onward, and the name Printing-house Yard indicates another aspect of civilization. Here was the King's printing-house in the days of the Stuarts; and here, in our own days, is the office of the 'Times' Newspaper, the organ of a greater power than that of prerogative. Between Apothecaries' Hall and Printing-house Yard is a short lane, leading into an open space called Playhouse Yard. It is one of those shabby places of which so many in London lie close to the glittering thoroughfares; but which are known only to their own inhabitants, and have at all times an air of quiet which seems like desolation. The houses of this little square, or yard, are neither ancient nor modern. Some of them were probably built soon after the great fire of London; for a few present their gable fronts to the streets, and the wide casements of others have evidently been filled up and modern sashes inserted. But there is nothing here, nor indeed in the whole precinct, with the exception of the few yards of the ancient wall, that has any pretension to belong to what may be called the antiquities of London. Yet here, three centuries ago, stood the great religious house of the Dominicans, or Black Friars, who were the lords of the precinct; shutting out all civic authority, and enclosing within their four gates a busy community of shopkeepers and artificers. Here, in the hallowed dust of the ancient church, were the royal and the noble buried; and their gilded tombs proclaimed their virtues to the latest posterity. Where shall we look for a fragment of these records now? Here parliaments have sat and pulled down odious favourites; here kings have required exorbitant aids from their complaining subjects; here Wolsey pronounced the sentence of divorce on the persecuted Katharine. In a few years the house of the Black Friars ceased to exist; their halls were pulled down; their church fell into ruin. The precinct of the Blackfriars then became a place of fashionable residence. Elizabeth, at the age of sixty, here danced at a wedding which united the houses of Worcester and Bedford. In the heart of this precinct, close by the church of the suppressed monastery, surrounded by the new houses of the nobility, in the very spot which is now known as Playhouse Yard, was built, in 1575, the Blackfriars Theatre.

The history of the early stage, as it is to be deduced from statutes, and proclamations, and orders of council, exhibits a constant succession of conflicts between the civic authorities and the performers of plays. The act of the 14th of Elizabeth, "for the punishment of vagabonds, and for relief of the poor and impotent," was essentially an act of protection for the established companies of players. We have here, for the first time, a definition of rogues and vagabonds; and it includes not only those who can "give no reckoning how he or she doth lawfully get his or her living," but "all fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, and minstrels, not belonging to any baron of this realm or towards any other honourable personage of greater degree; all jugglers, pedlers tinkers, and petty chapmen; which said fencers, bearwards, common players

in interludes, minstrels, jugglers, pedlers, tinkers, and petty chapmen, shall wander abroad, and have not licence of two justices of the peace at the least, whereof one to be of the quorum, where and in what shire they shall happen to wander." The circumstance of belonging to any baron, or person of greater degree, was in itself a pretty large exception; and if in those times of rising puritanism the licence of two justices of the peace was not always to be procured, the large number of companies enrolled as the servants of the nobility offers sufficient evidence that the profession of a player was not a persecuted one, but one expressly sanctioned by the ruling powers. The very same statute throws by implication as much odium upon scholars as upon players; for amongst its vagabonds are included "all scholars of the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge that go about begging, not being authorised under the seal of the said Universities."* There was one company of players, the Earl of Leicester's, which within two years after the legislative protection of this act received a more important privilege from the Queen herself. In 1574 a writ of privy seal was issued to the keeper of the great seal, commanding him to set forth letters patent addressed to all justices, &c., licensing and authorizing James Burbage, and four other persons, servants to the Earl of Leicester, "to use, exercise, and occupy the art and faculty of playing comedies, tragedies, interludes, stage-plays, and such other like as they have already used and studied, or hereafter shall use and study, as well for the recreation of our loving subjects, as for our solace and pleasure, when we shall think good to see them." And they were to exhibit their performances "as well within our city of London and liberties of the same," as "throughout our realm of England." Without knowing how far the servants of the Earl of Leicester might have been molested by the authorities of the city of London, in defiance of this patent, it is clear that the patent was of itself insufficient to insure their kind reception within the city; for it appears that, within three months after the date of the patent, a letter was written from the Privy Council to the Lord Mayor, directing him "to admit the comedy-players within the city of London, and to be otherwise favourably used." This mandate was probably obeyed; but in 1575 the Court of Common Council, without any exception for the objects of the patent of 1574, made certain orders, in the city language termed an act, which assumed that the whole authority for the regulation of plays was in the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen; that they only could license theatrical exhibitions within the city; and that the players whom they did license should contribute half their receipts to charitable purposes. The civic authorities appear to have stretched their power somewhat too far; for in that very year James Burbage, and the other servants of the Earl of Leicester, erected their theatre amidst the houses of the great in the Blackfriars, within a stone's throw of the city walls, but absolutely out of the control of the city officers. The immediate neighbours

* It is curious that the act against vagabonds of the 39th of Elizabeth somewhat softens this matter; for in its definition of vagabonds it includes "all persons *calling* themselves scholars, going about begging." It says nothing, with regard to players, about the licence of two justices; and requires that the nobleman's licence shall be under his hand and seal.

of the players were the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Hunsdon, as we learn from a petition against the players from the inhabitants of the precinct.* The petition was unavailing. The rooms which it states "one Burbadge hath lately bought" were converted "into a common playhouse;" and within fourteen years from the period of its erection William Shakspere was one of its proprietors.

The royal patent of 1574 authorised in the exercise of their art and faculty "James Burbadge, John Perkyn, John Lanham, William Johnson, and Robert Wylson," who are described as the servants of the Earl of Leicester. Although on the early stage the characters were frequently doubled, we can scarcely imagine that these five persons were of themselves sufficient to form a company of comedians. They had, no doubt, subordinate actors in their pay; they being the proprietors or shareholders in the general adventure. Of these five original patentees four remained as the "sharers in the Blackfriars Playhouse" in 1589, the name only of John Perkyn being absent from the subscribers to a certificate to the Privy Council that the company acting at the Blackfriars "have never given cause of displeasure in that they have brought into their plays matters of state and religion." This certificate—which bears the date of November, 1589—exhibits to us the list of the professional companions of Shakspere in an early stage of his career, though certainly not in the very earliest. The subject-matter of this document will require to be noticed in another chapter. The certificate describes the persons subscribing it as "her Majesty's poor players," and sets forth that they are "all of them sharers in the Blackfriars Playhouse." Their names are presented in the following order:—

1. James Burbadge.
2. Richard Burbadge.
3. John Laneham.
4. Thomas Greene.
5. Robert Wilson.
6. John Taylor.
7. Anth. Wadeson.
8. Thomas Pope.
9. George Peele.
10. Augustine Phillipps.
11. Nicholas Towley.
12. William Shakespeare.
13. William Kempe.
14. William Johnson.
15. Baptiste Goodale.
16. Robert Armyn.

The position of James Burbage at the head of the list is a natural one. He was no doubt the founder of this theatrical company. The petition of 1576

* Lord Hunsdon's name appears to this petition, but the Lord Chamberlain's does not appear.

against the Blackfriars Theatre mentions "one Burbadge" as having lately bought certain rooms in the precinct. This distinction was long preserved to his more celebrated son Richard, the second in the list. He died in 1619; and he probably continued at the head of the sharers until his decease gave occasion to the briefest epitaph ever written—"Exit Burbidge."* It would appear, from Jonson's masque of 'Christmas,' presented at Court in 1616, that Burbage and Heminge were joint managers; for Venus, who appears as "a deaf tire-woman," says she could have let out Cupid by the week to the King's players: "Master Burbage has been about and about with me, and so has old Master Heminge too; they have need of him." The early companionship of Shakspere with Richard Burbage became unquestionably a friendship which lasted through life; for he was one of the three professional friends—"fellows"—mentioned in the poet's will. Richard Burbage, by universal consent, was the greatest actor of his time. Sir Richard Baker calls him "such an actor as no age must ever look to see the like." William Shakspere and Richard Burbage were, in all probability, nearly of the same age. At the date of the certificate before us Shakspere was twenty-five. The third and fifth shares in this list were of the original patentees in 1574. But the fourth amongst those patentees stands the fourteenth in the list. If the order in the list be evidence of the rank which each person held in the company—and such a deduction is reasonable from the fact of the Burbages being at the head of the list—it is clear that the order was determined upon another principle than that of seniority. Of John Laneham, whose name follows that of the Burbages, we know nothing.

Thomas Greene, the fourth name attached to this certificate, is the person who has been conjectured to have been a native of Stratford-upon-Avon, and to have introduced Shakspere to the theatre. He was a comic actor, of great and original powers; and so celebrated was he as the representative of a particular part in one comedy, that the play was called after his name, 'Greene's Tu Quoque,' and bears his portrait in the title-page. This comedy, which long continued to be popular, was written by John Cook. Although the title-page of this play states that it "hath been divers times acted by the Queen's Majesty's servants," it is probable that Greene did not long continue a member of the company to which Shakspere belonged. He is mentioned by name in the 'Tu Quoque' as the clown at the Red Bull. His name does not appear in a petition to the Privy Council from the Blackfriars company in 1596; and he is not included in the list of the "names of the principal actors" of all Shakspere's plays, which is prefixed to the folio of 1623. Greene, as well as others of higher eminence, was a poet as well as an actor. In the lines which have been ascribed to him upon somewhat doubtful authority, he is made to say—

"I prattled poesy in my nurse's arms."

But his ambition was not powerful enough to induce him to claim the honours

* Philipot's additions to Camden's 'Remains concerning Britain.'

[Thomas Greene.]

of a poet till a very ripened age; for upon the accession of James I. he addressed to the king 'A Poet's Vision, and a Prince's Glory,' in which he is thus spoken to in the vision :—

> "What though the world saw never line of thine,
> Ne'er can the muse have a birth more divine."

Robert Wilson, the fifth on the list, was a person of great celebrity. He was amongst the first of the Queen's sworn servants in 1583. His reputation was long enduring as an actor in a very peculiar vein. Howes describes him as of "a quick, delicate, refined, extemporal wit." This was a traditional reputation. But Meres, writing in 1598, after mentioning Antipater Sidonius as "famous for extemporal verse in Greek," and alluding to a similar power in Tarleton, adds—"And so is now our witty Wilson, who for learning and extemporal wit, in this faculty is without compare or compeer, as to his great and eternal commendations he manifested in his challenge at the Swan on the Bankside." Wilson, as we have seen, belonged to the very earliest period of our regular drama; and there can be little doubt that originally a great deal of the comedy was improvised by men of real talent, such as Tarleton and himself. But Wilson was also a dramatic writer. Prior to 1580 he had written a play

on the subject of Catiline, which is mentioned in Lodge's Reply to Gosson.'* Of his poetical capacity we may form some judgment from one of his plays, 'The Cobbler's Prophecy,' printed as early as 1594. It probably belongs to an earlier period; for allegorical characters are introduced in company with the Heathen gods, and with a cobbler, by name Ralph, upon whom rests the burthen of the merriment, the character being probably sustained by Wilson himself. He was one of the authors also of 'Sir John Oldcastle, Part I.'† It appears from Henslowe's papers that Wilson was not only associated with three dramatic friends in writing this play, but that he, in the production of other pieces for Henslowe's theatre, repeatedly co-operated with Drayton, Chettle, Dekker, Anthony Munday, and others. We find entries of his name amongst Henslowe's authors from 1597 to 1600. His name is not amongst the petitioners of the Blackfriars company in 1596. We may therefore conclude that he had then quitted the company, and had become permanently associated with that of Henslowe, as a dramatic writer, and probably as a performer.

The sixth on the list, John Taylor, was probably an old actor; and might be the father of the famous Joseph Taylor, of whom tradition says that Shakspere taught him to play Hamlet. Anthony Wadeson, the seventh on the list, was a dramatic writer as well as a player. He probably had left the Blackfriars company early, for his name does not appear to the petition of 1596; and in 1601 we find him a writer for Henslowe's theatre. The diary of that manager contains the following entry amongst his catalogue of plays and their authors: 'The Honourable Life of the Humorous Earl of Gloster, with his Conquest of Portugal, by Anthony Wadeson.' His name is not amongst the list of actors of Shakspere's plays. Thomas Pope, the eighth name of the certificate, as well as Augustine Phillipps, the tenth name, are mentioned by Heywood, in his 'Apology for Actors,' 1612, amongst famous performers: "Though they be dead, their deserts yet live in the remembrance of many." Pope, Phillipps, Towley, Kempe, Richard Burbage, and Shakspere himself, are the only names in the list of 1589 which appear to the petition of 1596; and it is also to be noticed, that, out of the same sixteen persons, these six, with the addition of Robert Armin, are the only ones amongst the original fellows of Shakspere who are mentioned in the list of the names of the principal actors in Shakspere's plays. William Kempe, the thirteenth name in the certificate, was the famous successor of Tarleton, the extemporising clown, who died in 1588. Of this pair Heywood says, "Here I must needs remember Tarleton, in his time gracious with the Queen, his sovereign, and in the people's general applause, whom succeeded Will. Kempe, as well in the favour of her Majesty, as in the opinion and good thoughts of the general audience." Kempe was a person of overflowing animal spirits, as we may judge from his own extraordinary account of his morris-dance from London to Norwich. But it was for Shakspere to give his vivacity a right direction; and to associate his powers with such enduring delineations of human nature as Dogberry and Bottom. William Johnson, the fourteenth name, has been already mentioned as one of the first patentees. Of Baptist

* See p. 137. † See Analysis of Doubtful Plays, p. 210.

Goodall, the fifteenth in the list, we know nothing. Robert Armin, the last name in the document, was a comic actor, said to have been taught by Tarleton. He appears to have been a writer of ballads and other ephemeral publications, as well as an actor; for he is mentioned in this capacity by Thomas Nash, in a pamphlet of 1592.* Armin wrote several plays of no great merit or reputation; and he published a translation of a little Italian novel His 'Nest of Ninnies' has been reprinted by the Shakespeare Society. This tract, which contains very little that can interest us as a picture of the times, and which displays a brisk sort of buffoonery, on the part of its author, rather than any real wit or humour, is a collection of queer anecdotes of domestic fools, most of which, the editor of the reprint very justly observes, "will strike all readers as merely puerile and absurd." Armin's stories, however, are told with an absence of offensive ribaldry which was scarcely to be expected from his peculiar talent. He desires to make his readers laugh; but he does not seek to do so by obtruding the grossnesses by which his subject was necessarily surrounded.

We have thus run through the list of Shakspere's fellows in 1589, to point to the characters of the men with whom he was thrown into daily companionship. Some were of the first eminence as actors, and their names have survived the transitory reputation which belongs to their profession. Several had pretensions to the literary character, and probably were more actively engaged in preparing novelties for the early stage than we find recorded in its perishable annals. But there is one name, the ninth on the list, which we have purposely reserved for a more extended mention: it is that of George Peele.

In the 'Account of George Peele and his Writings,' prefixed to Mr. Dyce's valuable edition of his works (1829), the editor says, "I think it very probable that Peele occasionally tried his histrionic talents, particularly at the commencement of his career, but that he was ever engaged as a regular actor I altogether disbelieve." But the publication, in 1835, by Mr. Collier, of the certificate of the good conduct in 1589 of the Blackfriars company, which he discovered amongst the Bridgewater Papers, would appear to determine the question contrary to the belief of Mr. Dyce. Mr. Collier, in the tract in which he first published this important document,† says, with reference to the enumeration of Peele in the certificate, "George Peele was unquestionably the dramatic poet, who, I conjectured some years ago, was upon the stage early in life." The name of George Peele stands the ninth on this list; that of William Shakspere the twelfth. The name of William Kempe immediately follows that of Shakspere. Kempe must have become of importance to the company at least a year before the date of this certificate; for he was the successor of Tarleton in the most attractive line of characters, and Tarleton died in 1588. We hold that Shakspere had won his position in this company at the age of twenty-five by his success as a dramatic writer; and we consider that in the same manner George Peele had preceded him, and had acquired rank and property amongst the shareholders, chiefly by the exercise of his talents as a dra-

* Collier's Introduction to Armin's 'Nest of Ninnies,' p. xiii.

† New Facts regarding the Life of Shakespeare.

matic poet. Those of his dramatic works which have come down to us afford evidence that he possessed great flexibility and rhetorical power, without much invention, with very little discrimination of character, and with that tendency to extravagance in the management of his incidents which exhibits small acquaintance with the higher principles of the dramatic art. He no doubt became a writer for the stage earlier than Shakspere. He brought to the task a higher poetical feeling, and more scholarship, than had been previously employed in the rude dialogue which varied the primitive melodramatic exhibitions, which afforded a rare delight to audiences with whom the novel excitement of the entertainment compensated for many of its grossnesses and deficiencies. Thomas Nash, in his address 'To the Gentlemen Students of both Universities,' prefixed to Greene's 'Menaphon,' mentions Peele amongst the most celebrated poets of the day: "Should the challenge of deep conceit be intruded by any foreigner, to bring our English wits to the touchstone of art, I would prefer divine Master Spenser, the miracle of wit, to bandy line by line for my life, in the honour of England, against Spain, France, Italy, and all the world. Neither is he the only swallow of our summer (although Apollo, if his tripos were up again, would pronounce him his Socrates); but he being forborne there are extant about London many most able men to revive poetry, though it were executed ten thousand times, as in Plato's, so in Puritans' commonwealth; as, namely, for example, Matthew Roydon, Thomas Achlow, and George Peele; the first of whom, as he hath showed himself singular in the immortal epitaph of his beloved Astrophell, besides many other most absolute comic inventions (made more public by every man's praise than they can be by my speech); so the second hath more than once or twice manifested his deep-witted scholarship in places of credit; and for the last, though not the least of them all, I dare commend him unto all that know him, as the chief supporter of pleasance now living, the Atlas of poetry, and *primus verborum artifex*; whose first increase, the 'Arraignment of Paris,' might plead to your opinions his pregnant dexterity of wit, and manifold variety of invention, wherein (*me judice*) he goeth a step beyond all that write." 'The Arraignment of Paris,' which Nash describes as Peele's first increase, or first production, was performed before the Queen in 1584 by the children of her chapel. It is called in the title page "a pastoral." It is not improbable that the favour with which this mythological story of the Judgment of Paris was received at the Court of Elizabeth might in some degree have given Peele his rank in the company of the Queen's players, who appear to have had some joint interest with the children of the chapel. The pastoral possesses little of the dramatic spirit; but we occasionally meet with passages of great descriptive elegance, rich in fancy, though somewhat overlaboured. The goddesses, however, talk with great freedom, we might say with a slight touch of mortal vulgarity. This would scarcely displease the courtly throng; but the approbation would be overpowering at the close, when Diana bestows the golden ball, and Venus, Pallas, and Juno cheerfully resign their pretensions in favour of the superior beauty, wisdom, and princely state of the great Eliza. Such scenes were probably not for the multitude who thronged to the Blackfriars. Peele was the poet of the

City as well as of the Court. He produced a Lord Mayor's Pageant in 1585, when Sir Wolstan Dixie was chief magistrate, in which London, Magnanimity, Loyalty, the Country, the Thames, the Soldier, the Sailor, Science, and a quaternion of nymphs, gratulate the City in melodious verse. Another of his pageants before "Mr. William Web, Lord Mayor," in 1591, has come down to us. He was ready with his verses when Sir Henry Lee resigned the office of Queen's Champion in 1590; and upon the occasion also of an Installation at Windsor in 1593. When Elizabeth visited Theobalds in 1591, Peele produced the speeches with which the Queen was received, in the absence of Lord Burleigh, by members of his household, in the characters of a hermit, a gardener, and a mole-catcher. In all these productions we find the facility which distinguished his dramatic writings, but nothing of that real power which was to breathe a new life into the entertainments for the people. The early play of 'Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes' is considered by Dr. Dyce to be the production of Peele. It is a most tedious drama, in the old twelve-syllable rhyming verse, in which the principle of alliteration is carried into the most ludicrous absurdity, and the pathos is scarcely more moving than the woes of Pyramus and Thisbe in A Midsummer Night's Dream. One example of a lady in distress may suffice:—

> "The sword of this my loving knight, behold, I here do take.
> Of this my woeful corpse, alas, a final end to make!
> Yet, ere I strike that deadly stroke that shall my life deprave,
> Ye Muses, aid me to the gods for mercy first to crave!"

In a few years, perhaps by the aid of better examples, Peele worked himself out of many of the absurdities of the early stage; but he had not strength wholly to cast them off. We have noticed at some length his historical play of 'Edward I.' in the examination of the theory that he was the author of the three Parts of Henry VI. in their original state; and it is scarcely necessary for us here to enter more minutely into the question of his dramatic ability. It is pretty manifest that a new race of writers, with Shakspere at their head, was rising up to push Peele from the position which he held in the Blackfriars company in 1589. We think it is probable that he quitted that company soon after the period when Shakspere had become the master-spirit which won for the shareholders fame and fortune. His name is not found in the petition to the Privy Council in 1596. He is one of the three, moreover, to whom Robert Greene in 1592 addressed his dying warning. He was, according to the repentant profligate, driven like himself to extreme shifts. He was in danger, like Greene, of being forsaken by the puppets "that speak from our mouths." The reason that the players are not to be trusted is because their place is supplied by another: "Yes, trust them not; for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers, that, with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." The insult offered to Shakspere was atoned for by the editor of the unhappy Greene's posthumous effusion of malignity. We mention it here, as some indication of the difficulties with which the young poet had to

struggle, in coming amongst the monarchs of the barbarian stage with a higher ambition than that of being "*primus verborum artifex.*"

It would not be an easy matter, without some knowledge of minute facts and a considerable effort of imagination, to form an accurate notion of that building in the Blackfriars—rooms converted into a common playhouse—in which we may conclude that the first plays of Shakspere were exhibited. The very expression used by the petitioners against Burbage's project would imply that the building was not very nicely adapted to the purposes of dramatic representation. They say, "which rooms the said Burbage is now altering, and meaneth very shortly to convert and turn the same into a common playhouse." And yet we are not to infer that the rooms were hastily adapted to their object by the aid of a few boards and drapery, like the barn of a strolling company. In 1596 the shareholders say, in a petition to the Privy Council, that the theatre, "by reason of its having been so long built, hath fallen into great decay, and that, besides the reparation thereof, it has been found necessary to make the same more convenient for the entertainment of auditories coming thereto." The structure no doubt was adapted to its object without any very great regard to durability; and the accommodations, both for actors and audience, were of a somewhat rude nature. The Blackfriars was a winter theatre; so that, differing from the Globe, which belonged to the same company, it was, there can be little doubt, roofed in. It appears surprising that, in a climate like that of England, even a summer theatre should be without a roof; but the surprise is lessened when we consider that, when the Globe was built, in 1594, not twenty years had elapsed since plays were commonly represented in the open yards of the inns of London. The Belle Savage* was amongst the most famous of these inn-yard theatres; and some ten years ago the area of that inn showed how readily it might have been adapted for such performances. We turned aside from the crowds of Ludgate Hill, and passed down a gateway which opened into a considerable space. The inn occupied the east and north sides of the area, the west side consisted of private houses of business. But once the inn occupied the entire of the three sides, with open galleries running all round, and communicating with the chambers. Raise a platform with its back to the gateway for the actors, place benches in the galleries which run round three sides of the area, and let those who pay the least price be contented with standing-room in the yard, and a theatre, with its stage, pit, and boxes, is raised as quickly as the palace of Aladdin. The Blackfriars theatre was probably, therefore, little more than a large space arranged pretty much like the Belle Savage yard, but with a roof over it. Indeed, so completely were the public theatres adapted after the model of the temporary ones, that the space for the "groundlings" long continued to be called the yard. One of the earliest theatres, built probably about the same time as the Blackfriars, was called the Curtain, from which we may infer that the refinement of separating the actors from the audience during the intervals of the representation was at first peculiar to that theatre

* The old writers spell the word less learnedly than we.—*Belsavage.*

In the petition to the Privy Council in 1596, it is stated that the petitioners "are owners and players of the *private* house or theatre in the precinct or liberty of the Blackfriars." Yet the petition of the inhabitants of the precinct against the enterprise of Burbage, in 1576, states the intention of Burbage to convert the rooms which he has bought "into a common playhouse," and it alleges the inconvenience that will result from the "gathering together of all manner of vagrant and lewd persons, under colour of resorting to the plays." Here then is an apparent contradiction,—the Blackfriars theatre is called a private house, and also a common playhouse. But the seeming contradiction is reconciled when we learn that for many years a distinction was preserved between public and private theatres. The theatres of inn-yards were undoubtedly public theatres. The yard was hired for some short period, the scaffold hastily run up, and the gates closed, except to those who came with penny in hand. Such were the theatres of the Belle Savage in Ludgate Hill, the Cross Keys in Gracechurch Street, and the Bull in Bishopsgate Street. But, as we learn from a passage in an old topographer, in which he expressly mentions the Belle Savage, the penny at the theatre gate was something like the penny at the porch of our cathedral show-shops of the present day,—other pennies were demanded for a peep at the sights within. "Those who go to Paris Garden, the Belsavage, or Theatre, to behold bear-baiting, interludes, or fence-play, must not account of any pleasant spectacle, unless first they pay one penny at the gate, another at the entry of the scaffold, and a third for quiet standing."* The Paris Garden here mentioned was the old bear-baiting place which had existed from the time of Henry VIII, and perhaps earlier. The Belle Savage, rude as its accommodations doubtless were, had yet its graces and amenities, if Stephen Gosson be not a partial critic: "The two prose books played at the Bel-savage, where you shall find never a word without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vain."† The Theatre also mentioned by Lambarde was a public playhouse so called. It was situated in Shoreditch, without the City walls. In Aggas's map we see a tolerably continuous street, leading from Bishop's Gate to Shoreditch Church; but on each side of this street there is a wide extent of fields and gardens, Spital field to the east, and Finsbury field to the west, with rude figures, in the map, of cows and horses, archers, laundresses, and water-carriers, which show how completely this large district, now so crowded with human life in all its phases of comfort and misery, was in the days of Elizabeth a rural suburb. Stow, in the first edition of his 'Survey,' 1599, mentions the old Priory of St. John the Baptist, called Holy well. "The church thereof being pulled down, many houses have been there builded for the lodgings of noblemen, of strangers born, and other. And thereunto are builded two public houses for the acting and show of comedies, tragedies, and histories, for recreation. Whereof the one is called the Curtain, the other the Theatre, both standing on the south-west side

* Lambarde's 'Perambulation of Kent,' 1576.

† School of Abuse. 1579.

toward the field."* In a sermon by John Stockwood, in 1578, the Theatre is called a "gorgeous playing place." Stubbes, in 1583, rails bitterly against these public playhouses: "Mark the flocking and running to Theatres and Curtains." The early history of the less important theatres is necessarily involved in great obscurity. There were playhouses on the Bankside, against the immoralities of which, particularly as to playing on Sundays, the inhabitants of Southwark complained to the authorities in 1587; but it is not known when Henslowe's playhouse, the Rose, which was in that neighbourhood, was erected. The Swan and the Hope, also theatres of the Bankside, were probably, as well as the Rose, mean erections in the infancy of the stage, which afterwards grew into importance. There was an ancient theatre also at Newington, which offered its attractions to the holiday-makers who sallied out of the City to practise at the Butts.

In the continuation of Stow's 'Chronicle,' by Edmund Howes, there is a very curious passage, which carries us back from the period in which he was writing (1631) for sixty years. He describes the destruction of the Globe by fire in 1613, the burning of the Fortune Playhouse four years after, the rebuilding of both theatres, and the erection of "a new fair playhouse near the Whitefriars." He then adds,—"And this is the seventeenth stage, or common playhouse, which hath been new made within the space of threescore years within London and the suburbs, viz.: five inns, or common hostelries, turned to playhouses, one Cockpit, St. Paul's singing-school, one in the Blackfriars, and one in the Whitefriars, which was built last of all, in the year one thousand six hundred twenty-nine. All the rest not named were erected only for common playhouses, besides the new-built Bear-garden, which was built as well for plays, and fencers' prizes, as bull-baiting; besides one in former time at Newington Butts. Before the space of threescore years abovesaid I neither knew, heard, nor read of any such theatres, set stages, or playhouses, as have been purposely built within man's memory." It would appear, as far as we can judge from the very imperfect materials which exist, that in the early period of Shakspere's connection with the Blackfriars it was the only private theatre. At a subsequent period the Cockpit, or Phœnix, in Drury Lane, was a private theatre; and so was the theatre in Salisbury Court,—the "new fair playhouse near the Whitefriars" of Howes. What then was the distinction between the private theatre of the Blackfriars, of which Shakspere was a shareholder in 1589, and the permanent and temporary public theatres with which it entered into competition? It is natural to conclude that the proprietors of this theatre, being the Queen's servants, not merely nominally, but the sworn officers of her household, were the most respectable of their vocation; conformed to the ordinances of the state with the utmost scrupulousness; endeavoured to attract a select audience rather than an uncritical multitude; and received higher prices for

* Mr. Collier, who originally pointed out this passage, by comparing the printed copy with Stow's manuscript in the British Museum, found that "activities" (tumbling) were mentioned as performed at those theatres, as well as plays.

admission than were paid at the public theatres. The performances at the Blackfriars were for the most part in the winter. Whether the performances were in the day or evening, artificial lights were used. The audience in what we now call the pit (then also so called) sat upon benches, and did not stand as in the yard open to the sky of the public playhouses. There were small rooms corresponding with the private boxes of existing theatres. A portion of the audience, including those who aspired to the distinction of critics, sat upon the stage. "Though you be a magistrate of wit, and sit on the stage at Blackfriars to arraign plays daily," says the preface to the first folio of Shakspere. The passage we have quoted from Lambarde gives us a notion of the prices of admission at the very early theatres. Those who paid a penny for the "entry of the scaffold" had, of course, privileges not obtained by those who merely paid "the penny at the gate;" and those who, when they had reached the scaffold, had to pay another penny "for quiet standing," had no doubt the advantage of some railed-off space, in some degree similar to the stalls of the modern pit. But the mass of the audience must have been the penny payers. The passages in old plays and tracts which allude to the prices of admission, for the most part belong to the high and palmy period of the stage. But we learn from one of Lyly's tracts, in 1590, that the admission at "The Theatre" was twopence, and at St. Paul's fourpence; though a penny still seems from other authorities to have been the common price. It is possible, and indeed there is some evidence, that the rate of admission even then varied according to the attraction of the performance; and we may be pretty sure that a company like that of Shakspere's generally charged at a higher rate than the larger theatres, which depended more upon the multitude. At a much later period, Ben Jonson and Fletcher mention a price as high as half-a-crown; and the lowest price which Jonson mentions is sixpence. At a later period still, Jonson speaks of the six-penny mechanics of the Blackfriars. Those who sat upon the stage, it would appear, paid sixpence for a stool, in addition to their payment for admission. It is scarcely worth while to enter more minutely into the evidence on this point, which may be consulted by the curious in Malone's 'Historical Account of the English Stage,' and more fully in Mr. Collier's 'Annals of the Stage.' With these preliminary notices we may proceed to the picture of a new play at the Blackfriars, about a year or so before the period when it has been ascertained that Shakspere was one amongst the sixteen shareholders of that company, with four other shareholders, and those not unimportant persons, below him on the list.

On the posts of the principal thoroughfares of the City a little bill is affixed, announcing that a new History will be performed at the private theatre of the Blackfriars. The passengers are familiar with such bills; they were numerous enough in the year 1587 to make it of sufficient importance that one printer should be licensed by the Stationers' Company for their production. At an early hour in the afternoon the watermen are actively landing their passengers at the Blackfriars Stairs; and there are hasty steps along the narrow thoroughfares to the south of Lud Gate. The pit of the Blackfriars is soon filled. The

people for the most part wait for the performance in tolerable quiet, but now and then a disturbance takes place. If we may judge from sober documents and allusive satires, London was never so full of cheats and bullies as about this period. There is a curious passage in Henry Chettle's 'Kind-Harte's Dream," printed in 1593, in which tract the author, "sitting alone not long since, not far from Finsbury, in a taphouse of antiquity, attending the coming of such companions as might wash care away with carousing," falls asleep, and has a vision of five personages, amongst whom is Tarleton, the famous clown In the discourse which Tarleton makes is this passage: — "And let Tarleton entreat the young people of the city, either to abstain altogether from plays, or at their coming thither to use themselves after a more quiet order. In a place so civil as this city is esteemed, it is more than barbarously rude to see the shameful disorder and routs that sometimes in such public meetings are used. The beginners are neither gentlemen nor citizens, nor any of both their servants, but some lewd mates that long for innovation; and when they see advantage that either servingmen or apprentices are most in number they will be of either side.* Though indeed they are of no side, but men beside all honesty, willing to make booty of cloaks, hats, purses, or whatever they can lay hold on in a hurley-burley. These are the common causers of discord in public places If otherwise it happen, as it seldom doth, that any quarrel be between man and man, it is far from manhood to make so public a place their field to fight in: no men will do it but cowards that would fain be parted, or have hope to have many partakers." Amongst the quiet audience the sellers of nuts and pippins are gliding. Ever and anon a cork bounces out of a bottle of ale. Tobacco was not as yet. While the audience are impatiently waiting for the three soundings of trumpet that precede the prologue, a noise of many voices is heard behind the curtain which separates them from the stage. The noise is not of the actors; but of the crowd of spectators who have entered by the tiring-room door, and are struggling for places, or in eager groups communicating their expectations of the performance, and their opinions of the author. Amongst this crowd would be the dramatic writers of the time, who in all probability then, as without doubt at a subsequent period, had a free admission to the theatres generally, the stage being their prescriptive place.† We may venture to sketch the group of compeers that would be collected on this occasion, to witness the new production of one of Burbage's men, who, if we are not greatly mistaken, was not even then wholly unknown to fame as a dramatic writer.

Robert Greene has been described by his friend Henry Chettle as "a man of indifferent years, of face amiable, of body well-proportioned, his attire after the habit of a scholarlike gentleman, only his hair somewhat long."‡ At the period of which we are now writing Greene was probably under thirty years of age, for he took his degree of Bachelor of Arts at Cambridge in 1578. The "somewhat long hair" is scarcely incompatible with the "attire after the habit

* This indicates a state of quarrel between serving-men and apprentices

† See Ben Jonson's Induction to Cynthia's Revels.

‡ Kind Harte's Dream.

of a scholar." Chettle's description of the outward appearance of the man would scarcely lead us to imagine, what he has himself told us, that "his company were lightly the lewdest persons in the land." Greene took his degree of Master of Arts in 1583. In one of his posthumous tracts: 'The Repentance of Robert Greene,' which Mr. Dyce, the editor of his works, holds to be genuine, he says, "I left the University and away to London, where (after I had continued some short time, and driven myself out of credit with sundry of my friends) I became an author of plays, and a penner of love pamphlets, so that I soon grew famous in that quality, that who for that trade grown so ordinary about London as Robin Greene? Young yet in years, though old in wickedness, I began to resolve that there was nothing bad that was profitable: whereupon I grew so rooted in all mischief, that I had as great a delight in wickedness as sundry hath in godliness; and as much felicity I took in villainy as others had in honesty." The whole story of Greene's life renders it too probable that Gabriel Harvey's spiteful caricature of him had much of that real resemblance which renders a caricature most effective: "I was altogether unacquainted with the man, and never once saluted him by name: but who in London hath not heard of his dissolute and licentious living; his fond disguising of a Master of Art with ruffianly hair, unseemly apparel, and more unseemly company; his vainglorious and Thrasonical braving; his fripperly extemporizing and Tarletonizing; his apish counterfeiting of every ridiculous and absurd toy; his fine cozening of jugglers, and finer juggling with cozeners; his villainous cogging and foisting; his monstrous swearing and horrible forswearing; his impious profaning of sacred texts; his other scandalous and blasphemous raving; his riotous and outrageous surfeiting; his continual shifting of lodgings; his plausible mustering and banqueting of roysterly acquaintance at his first coming; his beggarly departing in every hostess's debt; his infamous resorting to the Bankside, Shoreditch, Southwark, and other filthy haunts; his obscure lurking in basest corners; his pawning of his sword, cloak, and what not, when money came short; his impudent pamphleting, fantastical interluding, and desperate libelling, when other cozening shifts failed?"* This is the bitterness of revenge, not softened even by the penalty which the wretched man had paid for his offence, dying prematurely in misery and solitariness, and writing from his lodging at a poor shoemaker's these last touching lines to the wife whom he had abandoned: "Doll, I charge thee by the love of our youth, and by my soul's rest, that thou wilt see this man paid: for if he and his wife had not succoured me, I had died in the streets." This catastrophe happened some four years after the time of which we are writing. Robert Greene is now surrounded by a group who are listening with delight to his eloquence and wit. Sometimes he extemporizes in a vein of lofty imagery; then he throws around him his sarcasms and invectives, heedless where they fall; and suddenly he breaks off into a licentious anecdote, which makes the better-minded, who had gathered round him to wonder at his facility, turn aside with pity or contempt. He is indifferent, so that his passionate love of

* Four Letters, &c., especially touching Robert Greene 1592.

display can be gratified; and, as he tells us, provided he continued to be "be loved of the more vainer sort of people." As a writer he is one amongst the most popular of his day. His little romances of some fifty pages each were the delight of readers for amusement for half a century. They were the companions of the courtly and the humble,—eagerly perused by the scholar of the University and the apprentice of the City. They reached the extreme range of popularity. In Anthony Wood's time they were "mostly sold on ballad-monger's stalls;" and Sir Thomas Overbury describes his Chambermaid as reading "Greene's works over and over." Some of these tales are full of genius, ill-regulated no doubt, but so pregnant with invention, that Skakspere in the height of his fame did not disdain to avail himself of the stories of his early contemporary.* The dramatic works of Greene were probably much more numerous than the few which have come down to us; and the personal character of the man is not unaptly represented in these productions. They exhibit great pomp and force of language; passages which degenerate into pure bombast from their ambitious attempts to display the power of words; slight discrimination of character; incoherence of incident; and an entire absence of that judgment which results in harmony and proportion. His extravagant pomp of language was the characteristic of all the writers of the early stage except Shakspere; and equally so were those attempts to be humorous which sank into the lowest buffoonery. In the lyrical pieces which are scattered up and down Greene's novels, there is occasionally a quiet beauty which exhibits the real depths of the man's genius. Amidst all his imperfections of character, that genius is fully acknowledged by the best of his contemporaries.

By the side of Greene stands Thomas Lodge, his senior in age, and greatly his superior in conduct. He has been a graduate of Oxford; next a player, though probably for a short time; and is now a member of Lincoln's Inn. He is probably hovering in the choice of a profession between physic and the law; for a successful physician of the name of Thomas Lodge is held to be identical with Lodge the poet. He is the author of a tragedy, 'The Wounds of Civil War: lively set forth in the true Tragedies of Marius and Sylla.' He had become a writer for the stage before the real power of dramatic blank verse had been adequately conceived. His lines possess not the slightest approach to flexibility; they invariably consist of ten syllables, with a pause at the end of every line—"each alley like its brother;" the occasional use of the triplet is the only variety. Lodge's tragedy has the appearance of a most correct and laboured performance; and the result is that of insufferable tediousness. With Greene he is an intimate. In conjunction with him he wrote, probably about this time, 'A Looking Glass for London,' one of the most extraordinary productions of that period of the stage, the character of which is evidently derived not from any desire of the writers to accommodate themselves to the taste of an unrefined audience, but from an utter deficiency of that common sense which could alone recommend their learning and their satire to the popular apprehension. For pedantry and absurdity 'The Looking-Glass for London'

* See Introductory Notice to A Winter's Tale.

is unsurpassed. Lodge, as well as Greene, was a writer of little romances; and here he does not disdain the powers of nature and simplicity. The early writers for the stage, indeed, seem one and all to have considered that the language of the drama was conventional: that the expressions of real passion ought never there to find a place; that grief should discharge itself in long soliloquies, and anger explode in orations set forth upon the most approved forms of logic and rhetoric. There is some of this certainly in the prose romances of Greene and Lodge. Lovers make very long protestations, which are far more calculated to display their learning than their affection. This is the sin of most pastorals. But nature sometimes prevails, and we meet with a touching simplicity, which is the best evidence of real power. Lodge, as well as Greene, gave a fable to Shakspere.*

Another of the chosen companions of Robert Greene stands at his elbow. It is Thomas Nash, who in his "beardless years" has thrown himself upon the town, having forfeited the honours which his talents would have commanded in the due course of his University studies. He is looked upon with some dread, and with more suspicion, for his vein is satire. In an age before that of newspapers and reviews, this young man is a pamphleteering critic; and very sharp, and to a great extent very just, is his criticism. The drama, even at this early period, is the bow of Apollo for all ambitious poets. It is Nash who, in the days of Locrine, and Tamburlaine, and perhaps Andronicus, is the first to laugh at "the servile imitation of vainglorious tragedians, who contend not so seriously to excel in action, as to embowel the clouds in a speech of comparison; thinking themselves more than initiated in poets' immortality if they but once get Boreas by the beard, and the heavenly Bull by the Dewlap."† It is he who despises the "idiot art-masters that intrude themselves to our ears as the alchymists of eloquence, who, mounted on the stage of arrogance, think to outbrave better pens with the swelling bombast of bragging blank verse."‡ As Greene is declaiming to those around him, Nash looks up to him with the admiration of his facility which thus shaped itself into printed words: "Give me the man whose extemporal vein in any humour will excel our greatest art-master's deliberate thoughts; whose inventions, quicker than his eye, will challenge the proudest rhetorician to the contention of like perfection with like expedition."§ In a year or two Nash was the foremost of controversialists. There are few things in our language written in a bitterer spirit than his pamphlets in the "Marprelate" controversy, and his letters to Gabriel Harvey. Greene, as it appears to us, upon his deathbed warned Nash of the danger of his course: "With thee [Marlowe] I join young Juvenal, that biting satirist, that lastly with me together writ a comedy. Sweet boy, might I advise thee, be advised, and get not many enemies by bitter words: inveigh against vain men, for thou canst do it, no man better, no man so well: thou hast a liberty to reprove all, and name none: for one being spoken to, all are offended; none being blamed, no man is injured. Stop shallow water still running, it will

* See Introductory Notice to As You Like It

† Epistle prefixed to Greene's 'Menaphon' ‡ Ibid. § Ibid.

rage; tread on a worm, and it will turn: then blame not scholars who are vexed with sharp and bitter lines, if they reprove thy too much liberty of reproof." It is usual to state that Thomas Lodge is the person thus addressed. So say Malone and Dr. Dyce. The expression, "that lastly with me together writ a comedy," is supposed to point to the union of Greene and Lodge in the composition of 'The Looking-Glass for London.' But it is much easier to believe that Greene and Nash wrote a comedy which is unknown to us, than that Greene should address Lodge, some years his elder, as "young Juvenal," and "sweet boy." Neither have we any evidence that Lodge was a "biting satirist," and used "bitter words" and personalities never to be forgiven. We hold that the warning was meant for Nash. It was given in vain; for he spent his high talents in calling others rogue and fool, and having the words returned upon him with interest; bespattering, and bespattered.

George Peele is dressed for his part, a minor one. But the knot we have attempted to describe are his familiar friends; and he must have a laugh and a sneer with them at the young author of the day. They regard that author as a pretender. He has taken no degree at the universities: he is not of their own habitual tavern acquaintance. His daily life is that of a base mechanical;—he labours hard at his desk. Old Burbage, experienced as he is, has learnt much from him in the economical management of their joint adventure. The sharers are prospering under his advice; but for such a drudge to write anything worth the listening, God save the mark! He is a favourite too; gentle, considerate, but unfailing in his own duty, and accustomed to expect order and punctuality in others. He is a mere novice in the ways of the town; pays his reckoning at the ordinary when he dines there; has never learnt to cog a die, and scarcely knows pedlers' French. The social accomplishments of George Peele are recorded in pamphlet and play;* and it is not to be wondered at if he looks upon William Shakspere with more than poetical rivalry.

But there is one of higher mark who occasionally mingles with this knot of dissolute wits, but suddenly turns away from them, as if he sought to breathe a purer atmosphere. That impatient spirit, with the flashing eye and the lofty brow, is Christopher Marlowe. It is the author of 'Tamburlaine the Great.' It is he who addressed his first audience in words which told them that one of high pretensions was come to rescue the stage from the dominion of feebleness and buffoonery:—

> "From jigging veins of rhyming mother wits,
> And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
> We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
> Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine,
> Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms."†

His daring was successful. It is he who is accounted the "famous gracer of tragedians."‡ It is he who has "gorgeously invested with rare ornaments and

* See 'The Merry Conceited Jests of George Peele,' and 'The Puritan.'
† Prologue to 'Tamburlaine the Great.' ‡ Greene.

splendid habiliments the English tongue."* It is he who, after his tragical end was held

"Fit to write passions for the souls below." †

It is he of the "mighty line."‡ The name of Tamburlaine was applied to Marlowe himself by his contemporaries. It is easy to imagine that he might be such a man as he has delighted to describe in his Scythian Shepherd :—

"Of stature tall, and straightly fashioned,
Like his desire lift upward and divine;
So large of limbs, his joints so strongly knit,
Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear
Old Atlas' burthen. . . .
Pale of complexion, wrought in him with passion,
Thirsting with sovereignty and love of arms,
His lofty brows in folds do figure death,
And in their smoothness amity and life;
About them hangs a knot of amber hair,
Wrapped in curls, as fierce Achilles' was,
On which the breath of heaven delights to play,
Making it dance with wanton majesty.
His arms and fingers, long and snowy-white,
Betokening valour and excess of strength"§

The essential character of his mind was that of a lofty extravagance, shaping itself into words that may be likened to the trumpet in music, and the scarlet in painting—perpetual trumpet, perpetual scarlet. One of the courtiers of Tamburlaine says,—

"You see, my lord, what working words he hath."

Hear a few of these "working words:"—

"The god of war resigns his room to me,
Meaning to make me general of the world:
Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,
Fearing my power should pull him from his throne.
Where'er I come the fatal sisters sweat,
And grisly Death, by running to and fro,
To do their ceaseless homage to my sword;
And here, in Afric, where it seldom rains,
Since I arriv'd with my triumphant host,
Have swelling clouds, drawn from wide-gasping wounds,
Been oft resolv'd in bloody, purple showers,
A meteor that might terrify the earth,
And make it quake at every drop it drinks." ||

Through five thousand lines have we the same pompous monotony, the same splendid exaggeration, the same want of truthful simplicity. But the man was in earnest. His poetical power had nothing in it of affectation and pretence. There is one speech of Tamburlaine which unveils the inmost mind of Tam-

* Meres. † Peele. ‡ Jonson.
§ Tamburlaine, Part I., Act II. || Ibid., Part I., Act V.

burlaine's author. It is by far the highest passage in the play, revealing to us something nobler than the verses which "jet on the stage in tragical buskins, every word filling the mouth like the faburden of Bow-bell:"*—

> "Nature that form'd us of four elements,
> Warring within our breasts for regiment,
> Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds;
> Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
> The wondrous architecture of the world,
> And measure every wandering planet's course,
> Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
> And always moving as the restless spheres,
> Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest,
> Until we reach the ripest fruit of all." †

The "ripest fruit of all," with Tamburlaine, was an "earthly crown;" but with Marlowe, there can be little doubt, the "climbing after knowledge infinite" was to be rewarded with wisdom, and peace, the fruit of wisdom. But he sought for the "fruit" in dark and forbidden paths. He plunged into the haunts of wild and profligate men, lighting up their murky caves with his poetical torch, and gaining nothing from them but the renewed power of scorning the unspiritual things of our being, without the resolution to seek for wisdom in the daylight track which every man may tread. If his life had not been fatally cut short, the fiery spirit might have learnt the value of meekness, and the daring sceptic have cast away the bitter "fruit" of half-knowledge. He did not long survive the fearful exhortation of his dying companion, the unhappy Greene:—"Wonder not, thou famous gracer of tragedians, that Greene, who hath said with thee, like the fool in his heart, there is no God, should now give glory unto His greatness: for penetrating is His power, His hand lies heavy upon me, He hath spoken unto me with a voice of thunder, and I have felt He is a God that can punish enemies. Why should thy excellent wit, His gift, be so blinded that thou shouldest give no glory to the giver?"‡ Marlowe resented the accusation which Greene's words conveyed. We may hope that he did more; that he felt, to use other words of the same memorable exhortation, that the "liberty" which he sought was an "infernal bondage."

Turn we to a soberer group than those we have described. On his stool, with his page behind him—for he is a courtier, though a poor one—sits "eloquent and witty John Lyly." § He was called, by a bookseller who collected his plays some forty years or more after their appearance, "the only rare poet of that time, the witty, comical, facetiously quick, and unparalleled John Lyly, Master of Arts." Such is the puff-direct of a title-page of 1632. The title-pages and the puffs have parted company in our day, to carry on their partnership in separate fields, and sometimes looking loftily on each other, as if they were not twin-brothers. He it was that took hold of the somewhat battered and clipped but sterling coin of our old language, and, minting it afresh, with a very sufficient quantity

* Greene. † Tamburlaine. Part I., Act II. ‡ Groat's-worth of Wit.
§ Meres.

of alloy, produced a sprakling currency, the very counters of court compliment. It was truly said, and it was meant for praise, that he "hath stepped one step further than any either before or since he first began the witty discourse of his 'Euphues.'" * He is now some forty years old. According to Nash, "he is but a little fellow, but he hath one of the best wits in England."† The little man smiles briskly upon all around him; but there is a furrow on his brow, for he knows

"What hell it is in suing long to bide."

He has been a dreary time waiting and petitioning for the place of Master of the Revels. In his own peculiar phraseology he tells the Queen, in one of his petitions,—"For these ten years I have attended with an unwearied patience, and now I know not what crab took me for an oyster, that in the middest of your sunshine, of your most gracious aspect, hath thrust a stone between the shells to rate me alive that only live on dead hopes." ‡ Drayton described him truly, at a later period, when poetry had asserted her proper rights, as

"Talking of stones, stars, plants, of fishes, flies,
Playing with words, and idle similies."

Lyly was undoubtedly the predecessor of Shakspere. His 'Alexander and Campaspe,' acted not only at Court but at the Blackfriars, was printed as early as 1584. It is not easy to understand how a popular audience could ever have sat it out; but the incomprehensible and the excellent are sometimes confounded. What should we think of a prologue, addressed to a gaping pit, and hushing the cracking of nuts into silence, which commences thus?—"They that fear the stinging of wasps make fans of peacock's tails, whose spots are like eyes: and Lepidus, which could not sleep for the chattering of birds, set up a beast whose head was like a dragon: and we, which stand in awe of report, are compelled to set before our owl Pallas's shield, thinking by her virtue to cover the other's deformity." Shakspere was a naturalist, and a true one; but Lyly was the more inventive, for he made his own natural history. The epilogue to the same play informs the confiding audience that "Where the rainbow toucheth the tree no caterpillars will hang on the leaves: where the glow-worm creepeth in the night no adder will go in the day." 'Alexander and Campaspe' is in prose. The action is little, the talk is everything. Hephæstion exhorts Alexander against the danger of love, in a speech that with very slight elaboration would be long enough for a sermon. Apelles soliloquizes upon his own love for Campaspe in a style so insufferably tedious, that we could wish to thrust the picture that he sighs over down his rhetorical throat (even as Pistol was made to swallow the leek), if he did not close his oration with one of the prettiest songs of our old poetry :—

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* Webbe's 'Discourse of English Poetry,' 1586.

† Apology of Pierce Pennilesse.

‡ Petition to the Queen in the Harleian MSS.: Dodsley's Old Plays, 1825, vol. ii.

"Cupid and my Campaspe play'd
At cards for kisses, Cupid paid;
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves and team of sparrows
Loses them, too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how),
With these the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes,
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?"

The dramatic system of Lyly is a thing unique in its kind. He never attempts to deal with realities. He revels in pastoral and mythological subjects. He makes his gods and goddesses, his nymphs and shepherds, all speak a language which common mortals would disdain to use. In prose or in verse, they are all the cleverest of the clever. They are, one and all, passionless beings, with no voice but that of their showman. But it is easy to see how a man of considerable talent would hold such things to be the proper refinements to banish for ever the vulgarities of the old comedy. He had not the genius to discover that the highest drama was essentially for the people; and that its foundations must rest upon the elemental properties of mankind, whether to produce tears or laughter that should command a lasting and universal sympathy. Lyly came too early, or too late, to gather any enduring fame; and he lived to see a new race of writers, and one towering above the rest, who cleared the stage of his tinselled puppets, and filled the scene with noble copies of humanity. His fate was a hard one. Without the vices of men of higher talent, he had to endure poverty and disappointment, doomed to spin his "pithy sentences and gallant tropes" for a thankless Court and a neglectful multitude; and, with a tearful merriment, writing to his Queen, "In all humility I entreat that I may dedicate to your Sacred Majesty Lyly de Tristibus, wherein shall be seen patience labours, and misfortunes."

Around Lyly are collected the satellites of the early stage, looking perhaps with little complacency upon the new author, whose bolder and simpler style, though scarcely yet developed—whose incidents, though encumbered as yet with superfluous horrors—have seized upon the popular mind as something to be felt and understood. The critics can scarcely comprehend that there is genius in this young man; for he labours not at words, and appears to have no particular anxiety to be fine and effective. Robert Wilson, of whom we have spoken, compares notes with the great Euphuist; and they think the age is growing degenerate. Thomas Kyd is there in the full flush of his popularity. He is the author of 'Jeronimo,' which men held a dozen years after "was the only best and judiciously penned play in Europe." * It is of the same period as

* Jonson's Induction to 'Cynthia's Revels.'

Andronicus. Wherever performed originally, the principal character was adapted to an actor of very small stature. It is not impossible that a precocious boy, one of the children of Paul's, might have filled the character. Jeronimo the Spanish marshal, and Balthazar the Prince of Portugal, thus exchange compliments :—

> "*Balthazar.* Thou inch of Spain,
> Thou man, from thy hose downward scarce so much,
> Thou very little longer than thy beard,
> Speak not such big words; they 'll throw thee down,
> Little Jeronimo : words greater than thyself !
> It must be.
> *Jeronimo.* And thou, long thing of Portugal, why not ?
> Thou that art full as tall
> As an English gallows, upper beam and all,
> Devourer of apparel, thou huge swallower,
> My hose will scarce make thee a standing collar :
> What ! have I almost quited you ?"

There can be no doubt that 'Jeronimo,' whatever remodelling it may have received, belongs essentially to the early stage. There is killing beyond all reasonable measure. Lorenzo kills Pedro, and Alexandro kills Rogero : Andrea is also killed, but he does not so readily quit the scene. After a decent interval, occupied by talk and fighting, the man comes again in the shape of his own ghost, according to the following stage-direction :—" Enter two, dragging of ensigns ; then the funeral of Andrea : next Horatio and Lorenzo leading Prince Balthazar captive : then the Lord General, with others, mourning : a great cry within, Charon, a boat, a boat : then enter Charon and the Ghost of Andrea." Charon, Revenge, and the Ghost have a little pleasant dialogue ; and the Ghost then vanishes with the following triumphant words :—

> "I am a happy ghost ;
> Revenge, my passage now cannot be cross'd :
> Come, Charon ; come, hell's sculler, waft me o'er
> Your sable streams which look like molten pitch ;
> My funeral rites are made, my hearse hung rich."

The Ghost of Shakspere's first Hamlet was, we have little doubt, an improvement upon this personage.

Henry Chettle, a friend of Greene, but who seems to have been a man of higher morals, if of inferior genius ; and Anthony Munday, who was called by Meres " the best plotter " (by which he probably means a manufacturer of dumb shows), are the only remaining dramatists whose names have escaped oblivion that can be called contemporaries of Shakspere in his early days at the Blackfriars.

Chettle is one of the very few persons who have left us any distinct memorial of Shakspere. He appears to have had some connexion with the writers of his time, in preparing their manuscripts for the press. He so prepared Greene's posthumous tract, 'The Groat's-worth of Wit,' copying out the author's faint and blotted sheets, written on his sick-bed. He says, in the

preface to 'Kind-Harte's Dream,' in which he is very anxious to explain the share which he had in the publication of Greene's pamphlet, "I had only in the copy this share: it was ill-written, as sometimes Greene's hand was none of the best; licensed it must be, ere it could be printed, which could never be if it might not be read. To be brief, I writ it over, and, as near as I could, followed the copy, only in that letter I put something out, but in the whole book not a word in; for I protest it was all Greene's, not mine, nor Master Nash's, as some unjustly have affirmed." In this pamphlet of Greene's an insult was offered to Shakspere; and it would appear from the allusions of Chettle that he was justly offended. Marlowe, also, resented, as well he might, the charge of impiety which was levelled against him. Chettle says, "With neither of them that take offence was I acquainted." By acquaintance he means companionship, if not friendship. He goes on, "And with one of them I care not if I never be." He is supposed here to point at Marlowe. But to the other he tenders an apology, in all sincerity: "The other, whom at that time I did not so much spare as since I wish I had, for that as I have moderated the heat of living writers, and might have used my own discretion (especially in such a case), the author being dead, that I did not I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault; because myself have seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes: besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art." In the Induction to 'Cynthia's Revels' Ben Jonson makes one of the personified spectators on the stage say, "I would speak with your author; where is he?" It may be presumed, therefore, that it was not uncommon for the author to mix with that part of the audience; and thus Henry Chettle may be good evidence of the civil demeanour of William Shakspere. We may imagine the young "maker" composedly moving amidst the throng of wits and critics that fill the stage. He moves amongst them modestly, but without any false humility. In worldly station, if such a consideration could influence his demeanour, he is fully their equal. They are for the most part, as he himself is, actors, as well as makers of plays. Phillips says Marlowe was an actor. Greene is reasonably conjectured to have been an actor. Peele and Wilson were actors of Shakspere's own company; and so was Anthony Wadeson. There can be little doubt that upon the early stage the occupations for the most part went together. The dialogue was less regarded than the action. A plot was hastily got up, with rude shows and startling incidents. The characters were little discriminated; one actor took the tyrant line, and another the lover; and ready words were at hand for the one to rant with and the other to whine. The actors were not very solicitous about the words, and often discharged their mimic passions in extemporaneous eloquence. In a few years the necessity of pleasing more refined audiences changed the economy of the stage. Men of high talent sought the theatre as a ready mode of maintenance by their writings; but their connexion with the stage would naturally begin in acting rather than in authorship. The managers, themselves actors, would think, and perhaps

rightly, that an actor would be the best judge of dramatic effect; and a Master of Arts, unless he were thoroughly conversant with the business of the stage, might better carry his taffeta phrases to the publishers of sonnets. The rewards of authorship through the medium of the press were in those days small indeed; and paltry as was the dramatist's fee, the players were far better pay-masters than the stationers. To become a sharer in a theatrical speculation offered a reasonable chance of competence, if not of wealth. If a sharer existed who was "excellent" enough in "the quality" he professed to fill the stage creditably, and added to that quality "a facetious grace in writing," there is no doubt that with "uprightness of dealing" he would, in such a company as that of the Blackfriars, advance rapidly to distinction, and have the countenance and friendship of "divers of worship." One of the early puritanical attacks upon the stage has this coarse invective against players: "Are they not notoriously known to be those men in their life abroad, as they are on the stage, roysters, brawlers, ill-dealers, boasters, lovers, loiterers, ruffians? So that they are always exercised in playing their parts and practising wickedness; making that an art, to the end that they might the better gesture it in their parts?"* By the side of this silly abuse may be placed the modest answer of Thomas Heywood, the most prolific of writers, himself an actor: "I also could wish that such as are condemned for their licentiousness might by a general consent be quite excluded our society; for, as we are men that stand in the broad eye of the world, so should our manners, gestures, and behaviours, savour of such government and modesty, to deserve the good thoughts and reports of all men, and to abide the sharpest censure even of those that are the greatest opposites to the quality. Many amongst us I know to be of substance, of government, of sober lives, and temperate carriages, housekeepers, and contributory to all duties enjoined them, equally with them that are ranked with the most bountiful; and if, amongst so many of sort, there be any few degenerate from the rest in that good demeanour which is both requisite and expected from their hands, let me entreat you not to censure hardly of all for the misdeeds of some, but rather to excuse us, as Ovid doth the generality of women:—

> 'Parcite paucarum diffundere crimen in omnes;
> Spectetur meritis quæque puella suis.'"†

Those of Shakspere's early competitors who approached the nearest to him in genius possessed not that practical wisdom which carried him safely and honourably through a life beset with some temptations. They knew not the value of "government and modesty." He lived amongst them, but we may readily believe that he was not of them.

The curtain is drawn back, slowly, and with little of mechanical contrivance. The rush-strewn stage is presented to the spectators. The play to be performed is Henry VI. The funeral procession of Henry V. enters to a dead march; a

* Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Players.
† Apology for Actors.

few mourners in sable robes following the bier. The audience is silent as the imaginary corse; but their imaginations are not stimulated with gorgeous scenery. There is no magical perspective of the lofty roof and long-drawn aisles of Westminster Abbey; no organ peals, no trains of choristers with tapers and censers sing the Requiem. The rushes on the floor are matched with the plain arras on the walls. Bedford speaks:—

"Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night."

Lofty in his tone, corresponding with the solemn and unvarying rhythm. It is the "drumming decasyllabon" which Nash ridicules. The great master of a freer versification is not yet confident of his power. The attention of the auditory is fixed by the stirring introduction. There are old remembrances of national honour in every line. The action moves rapidly. The mourners disperse; and by an effort of imagination the scene must be changed from England to France. Charles the king marches with drum and soldiers. The English are encountered, the French are beaten. The Maid of Orleans appears. The people will see the old French wars which live in their memories fought over again; and their spirits rise with every alarum. But the poet will show too the ruinous course of faction at home. The servingmen of Gloucester and Winchester battle at the Tower gates. The Mayor of London and his officers suppress the riot. Again to Orleans, where Salisbury is slain by a fatal linstock. All is bustle and contention in France; but the course of intrigue in England is unfolded. The first page of the fatal history of York and Lancaster is here read. We see the growth of civil war at home; we trace the beginnings of disaster abroad. The action presents a succession of events, rather than developing some great event brought about by a skilful adjustment of many parts. But in a "chronicle history" this was scarcely to be avoided; and it is easy to see how, until the great principle of art which should produce a Lear and a Macbeth was evolved, the independent succession of events in a chronicle history would not only be the easiest to portray by a young writer, but would be the most acceptable to an uncritical audience, that had not yet been taught the dependences of a catastrophe upon slight preceding incidents, upon niceties of character, upon passion evolved out of seeming tranquillity, the danger of which has been skilfully shadowed forth to the careful observer. It was in detached passages, therefore, that the young poet would put out his strength in such a play. The death of Talbot and his son was a fit occasion for such an effort; and the early stage had certainly seen nothing comparable in power and beauty to the couplets which exhibit the fall of the hero and his boy. Other poets would have noticed the scene. Shakspere painted it; and his success is well noticed by Thomas Nash, who for once loses his satirical vein in fervent admiration:—"How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that, after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the tragedian

that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding!" * The prejudices of the age are gratified by the condemnation of the Pucelle; but the poet takes care to make it felt that her judges are "bloody homicides." At the very close of the play a new series of events is opened, ending here with the mission of Suffolk to bring a bride for the imbecile king; but showing that the issue is to be presented in some coming story. The new play is a success: and the best of his brother poets have a ready welcome for the author, in spite of a sneer or two at "Shake-scene."

* Pierce Pennilesse.

NOTE ON THE DATE OF NASH'S EPISTLE PREFIXED TO 'MENAPHON.'

Thomas Nash took his degree of Bachelor of Arts at Cambridge in 1585. In a tract published in 1595, Cambridge is said to have been unkind to Nash in weaning him before his time. As he never took a higher degree than that of Bachelor of Arts, he is supposed to have left the university in some disgrace. He is held to have travelled before he acquired a distinction amongst the satirical and controversial writers of London. In the address to 'Menaphon' he says to the gentlemen-students—"Read favourably to encourage me in the firstlings of my folly." It has been usual to assign the date of this epistle to 1589. The first recorded edition of Greene's 'Menaphon' bears the date of that year. Nash in the epistle promises a satirical work called 'Anatomy of Absurdities,' and in 1589 such a work appears. Mr. Dyce, however, fixes the date of the first edition of 'Menaphon' as 1587; but he cites the title from the earliest edition he has met with, that of 1589. It would be satisfactory to know upon what authority an earlier date than that of 1589 is given to Nash's edition. If Nash wrote the epistle in 1589, his high praise of Peele as the Atlas of poetry, and the omission of all mention of Marlowe, looks like partiality, if not prejudice. If it first appeared in 1587, there is less suspicion for an unworthy motive for the omission of Marlowe. The same reasoning applies to Shakspere. But we apprehend that the date of 1587 is a mistake. The reference made in the epistle of Nash to a play of Hamlet—"whole Hamlets—I should say handfuls—of tragical speeches" (see p. 259)—has been held by persons whose opinions are entitled to more weight than our own to be an allusion to the Hamlet of Shakspere—an earlier Hamlet than any we possess. But this does not fall in with the theory that Shakspere first began to write for the stage about six or seven years after he became connected with the theatre. It is, therefore, convenience adopt Mr. Dyce's date of 1587 without inquiry; and to say "there cannot be a moment's doubt" that the Hamlet alluded to by Nash "was written and acted many years before Shakspeare's tragedy." See Mr. Collier's Introduction to 'The History of Hamlet,' 1841; in which he says, without qualification, "Malone erred as to the date of Greene's 'Menaphon.'" Malone gives the date as 1589. But in his Introduction to Nash's 'Pierce Pennilesse,' 1842, Mr. Collier speaks more doubtingly:—"We take the date of Greene's 'Menaphon,' 1587, from the edition of that author's Dramatic Works by the Rev. A. Dyce. He does not seem to have met with any copy of it of so early a date as 1587, and quotes the title-page of the impression of 1589." As regards the possible allusion to Shakspere's first Hamlet, we look upon the difference of two years as a matter of little importance; for a Hamlet whose characteristic was "whole handfuls of tragical speeches" might have been as readily produced by the Shakspere of twenty-three as by the Shakspere of twenty-five. (See our Notice on the Authenticity of Titus Andronicus, p. 58, and the Introductory Notice to Hamlet.)

NOTE ON MARLOWE.

It has long been the fashion to consider Marlowe as the precursor of Shakspere; to regard Marlowe as one of the founders of the regular drama, and Shakspere only as an improver. The internal evidence for this belief has been entered into with some fulness in our Essay on the Three Parts of Henry VI., &c. We may here say a few words as to the external evidence. Marlowe was killed in a wretched brawl on the 1st of June, 1593. Of his age nothing is exactly known; but he took his degree of Bachelor of Arts, in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1583; and that of Master of Arts in 1587. The age of Elizabeth had its boy bachelors, as well as that of her father. Youths went earlier to the university than in our time, and received their first degree earlier. We may conclude, therefore, that Marlowe was not older than Shakspere. Phillips, in his 'Theatrum Poetarum,' thus speaks of him:—"Christopher Marlowe, a kind of a second Shakspeare (whose contemporary he was), not only because like him he rose from an actor to be a maker of plays, though inferior both in fame and merit," &c. We have no distinct record of Marlowe as an actor. We know that he was early a maker of plays. There appears to be little doubt that he was the author of 'Tamburlaine;' and 'Tamburlaine' is mentioned by Greene in 1588. But Hamlet is mentioned by Nash in 1587 (if 1587 be the date of Greene's 'Menaphon'), and the evidence is quite as good that this was the Hamlet of Shakspere, as that the other was the 'Tamburlaine' of Marlowe. The young Shakspere and the young Marlowe, it is agreed, were nearly of the same age. What right have we to infer that the one could produce a 'Tamburlaine' at the age of twenty-four or twenty-five, and the other not produce an imperfect outline of his own Hamlet at the same age? Malone connects the supposed date of Shakspere's commencement as a dramatic writer with the notice of him by some of his contemporaries. He passes over Nash's "whole Hamlets;" he maintains that Spenser's description, in 1591, of the "gentle spirit," who

> "Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to mockery to sell,"

applied not to Shakspere, but to Lyly, who was at that instant most active in "mockery;" but he fixes Shakspere with having *begun* to write in 1592, because Greene in that year sneers at him as "the only Shake-scene in a country." Does a young writer *suddenly* jump into the distinction of a sneer of envy from one much older in reputation, as Greene was? In an age when there were no newspapers and no reviews, it must be extremely difficult to trace the course of any man, however eminent, by the notices of the writers of his times. An author's fame, then, was not borne through every quarter of the land in the very hour in which it was won. More than all, the reputation of a dramatic writer could scarcely be known, except to a resident in London, until his works were committed to the press. The first play of Shakspere's which was printed was The First Part of the Contention (Henry VI., Part II.), and that did not appear till 1594. Now, Malone says, "In Webbe's 'Discourse of English Poetry,' published in 1586, we meet with the names of most of the celebrated poets of that time; particularly those of George Whetstone and Anthony Munday, who were dramatic writers; but we find no trace of our author, or of any of his works." But Malone does not tell us that in Webbe's 'Discourse of Poetry,' we find the following passage:—"I am humbly to desire pardon of the learned company of gentlemen scholars, and students of the universities and inns of court, if I omit their several commendations in this place, which I know a great number of them have worthily deserved, in many rare devices and singular inventions of poetry: for neither hath it been my good hap to have seen all which I have heard of, neither is my abiding in such place where I can with facility get knowledge of their works."

"Three years afterwards," continues Malone, "Puttenham printed his 'Art of English Poesy;'

and in that work also we look in vain for the name of Shakspeare." The book speaks of the one-and-thirty years' space of Elizabeth's reign; and thus puts the date of the writing a year earlier than the printing. But we here look in vain for some other illustrious names besides that of Shakspere. Malone has not told us that the *name* of Edmund Spenser is not found in Puttenham; nor, what is still more uncandid, that not one of Shakspere's early dramatic contemporaries is mentioned—neither Marlowe, nor Greene, nor Peele, nor Kyd, nor Lyly. The author evidently derives his knowledge of "poets and poesy" from a much earlier period than that in which he publishes. He does not mention Spenser by *name*, but he does "that other gentleman who wrote the late 'Shepherd's Calendar.'" The 'Shepherd's Calendar' of Spenser was published in the year 1579. Malone goes on to argue that the omission of Shakspere's name, or any notice of his works in Sir John Harrington's 'Apology of Poetry,' printed in 1591, in which "he takes occasion to speak of the theatre, and mentions some of the celebrated dramas of that time," is a proof that none of Shakspere's dramatic compositions had then appeared. The reader will be in a better position to judge of the value of this argument by a reference to the passage of Sir John Harrington:—"For tragedies, to omit other famous tragedies: that, that was played at St. John's in Cambridge, of Richard III., would move, I think, Phalaris the tyrant, and terrify all tyrannous-minded men." [This was a Latin play, by Dr. Legge, acted some years before 1588.] "Then for comedies. How full of harmless mirth is our Cambridge 'Pedantius' and the Oxford 'Bellum Grammaticale'!" [Latin plays again.] "Or, to speak of a London comedy, how much good matter, yea, and matter of state, is there in that comedy called 'The Play of the Cards,' in which it is showed how four parasitical knaves robbed the four principal vocations of the realm; videl. the vocation of soldiers, scholars, merchants, and husbandmen! Of which comedy, I cannot forget the saying of a notable wise counsellor that is now dead, who, when some (to sing Placebo) advised that it should be forbidden, because it was somewhat too plain, and indeed as the old saying is (sooth boord is no boord), yet he would have it allowed, adding it was fit that they which do that they should not, should hear that they would not."

Nothing, it will be seen, can be more exaggerated than Malone's statement, "He takes occasion to speak of the theatre, and mentions some of the celebrated dramas of that time." Does he mention 'Tamburlaine,' or 'Faustus,' or 'The Massacre of Paris,' or 'The Jew of Malta'? As he does not, it may be assumed with equal justice that none of Marlowe's compositions had appeared in 1591; and yet we know that he died in 1593. So of Lyly's 'Galathea,' 'Alexander and Campaspe,' 'Endymion,' &c. So of Greene's 'Orlando Furioso,' 'Friar Bacon,' 'James IV.' So of the 'Spanish Tragedy' of Kyd. The truth is, that Harrington in his notice of celebrated dramas was even more antiquated than Puttenham; and his evidence, therefore, in this matter, is utterly worthless. But Malone has given his crowning proof that Shakspere had not written before 1591, in the following words:—"Sir Philip Sidney, in his 'Defence of Poesie,' speaks at some length of the low state of dramatic literature at the time he composed this treatise, but has not the slightest allusion to Shakspeare, whose plays, had they then appeared, would doubtless have rescued the English stage from the contempt which is thrown upon it by the accomplished writer; and to which it was justly exposed by the wretched compositions of those who preceded our poet. 'The Defence of Poesie' was not published till 1595, but must have been written some years before." There is one slight objection to this argument: Sir Philip Sidney was killed at the battle of Zutphen, in the year 1586; and it would really have been somewhat surprising if the illustrious author of the 'Defence of Poesy' could have included Shakspere in his account "of the low state of dramatic literature at the time he composed this treatise," which was in effect a reply to 'The School of Abuse' of Gosson, and to other controversialists of the puritanical faction, who were loudest about 1580. At that time Shakspere was sixteen years of age.

[The Misfortunes of Arthur.]

CHAPTER II.

THE COURT AT GREENWICH.

At the close of the year 1587, and the opening, according to our new style, of 1588, "the Queen's Majesty being at Greenwich, there were showed, presented, and enacted before her Highness, betwixt Christmas and Shrovetide, seven plays, besides feats of activity and other shows, by the children of Paul's, her Majesty's own servants, and the gentlemen of Gray's Inn, on whom was employed divers remnants of cloth of gold and other stuff out of the store.' Such is the record of the accounts of the revels at Court. Of the seven plays performed by the children of Paul's and the Queen's servants there is no memorial; but we learn from the title of a book of uncommon rarity of what

nature were the "Certaine Devises and Shewes presented Her Majestie by the Gentlemen of Graye's Inne, at Her Highnesse Court in Greenwich, the twenty-eighth day of Februarie, in the thirtieth yeare of Her Majestie's most happy raigne."* The "Misfortunes of Arthur, Uther Pendragon's son," was the theme of these devices and shows. It was "reduced into tragical notes by Thomas Hughes, one of the society of Gray's Inn. It was "set down as it passed from under his hands, and as it was presented, excepting certain words and lines, where some of the actors either helped their memories by brief omission, or fitted their acting by alteration." Thomas Hughes also tells us that he has put "a note at the end of such speeches as were penned by others, in lieu of these hereafter following." It is pleasant to imagine the gentlemen of Gray's Inn sitting over their sack during the Christmas of 1587, listening to Thomas Hughes reciting his doleful tragedy; cutting out a speech here, adding something wondrously telling there; the most glib of tongue modestly declining to accept the part of Arthur the king, and expressing his content with Mordred the usurper; a beardless student cheerfully agreeing to wear the robes of Guenevra the queen; and a grey-headed elder undertaking the Ghost of the Duke of Cornwall. A perfect play it is, if every accessory of a play can render it perfect; for every act has an argument, and every argument a dumb-show, and every dumb-show a chorus. Here is indeed an ample field for ambitious members of the honourable society to contribute their devices; and satisfactory it is that the names of some of his fellow-labourers in this elaborate work have been preserved to us by the honour-giving Thomas Hughes. "The dumb-shows and additional speeches were partly devised by William Fulbeck, Francis Flower, Christopher Yelverton, Francis Bacon, John Lancaster, and others, who with Master Penroodock and Lancaster directed these proceedings at Court." Precious is this record. The salt that preserves it is the one name of Francis Bacon. Bacon, in 1588, was Reader of Gray's Inn. To the devices and shows of Hughes's tragedy—accompaniments that might lessen the tediousness of its harangues, and scatter a little beauty and repose amongst its scenes of crime and murder—Bacon would bring something of that high poetical spirit which gleams out at every page of his philosophy. Nicholas Trotte, gentleman, penned the Introduction, "which was pronounced in manner following, namely, three Muses came upon the stage apparelled accordingly, bringing five gentlemen-students attired in their usual garments, whom one of the Muses presented to her Majesty as captives." But the dresses, the music, the dancing to song, were probably directed by the tasteful mind who subsequently wrote, "These things are but toys; but yet, since princes will have such things, it is better that they should be graced with elegancy than daubed with cost."† Under the roof then of the old palace at Greenwich—the palace which Humphrey of Gloucester is said to have built, and where Elizabeth was born—are assembled the gentlemen of Gray's Inn and the Queen's players. The two master-spirits of their time—amongst the very greatest of all time—are there.

* A copy is in the Garrick Collection, in the British Museum.

† Of Masques and Triumphs: Essay 37

[Bacon.]

Francis Bacon, the lawyer, and William Shakspere, the actor, are unconscious each of the greatness of the other. The difference of their rank probably prevents that communication which might have told each something of the other's power. Master Penroodock and Master Lancaster may perhaps solicit a little of the professional advice of Burbage and his men; and the other gentlemen who penned the dumb-shows may have assisted at the conference. A flash of wit from William Shakspere may have won a smile from the Reader of Gray's Inn; and he may have dropped a scrap of that philosophy which is akin to poetry, so as to make the young actor reverence him more highly than as the son of Elizabeth's former honest Lord Keeper. But the signs of that freemasonry by which great minds know each other could scarcely be exchanged. They would go their several ways, the one to tempt the perils and the degradations of ambition, and to find at last a refuge in philosophy; the other to be content with a well-earned competence, and gathering amidst petty strifes and jealousies, if such could disturb him, something more than happiness in the culture of that wondrous imagination which had its richest fruits in his own unequalled cheerful wisdom.

Elizabeth, the Queen, is now in her fifty-fifth year. She is ten years younger than when Paul Hentzner described her, as he saw her surrounded with her state in this same palace. The wrinkles of her face, oblong and fair, were perhaps not yet very marked. Her small black eyes, according to the same authority, were pleasant even in her age. The hooked nose, the narrow lips, and the discoloured teeth, were perhaps less noticeable when Shakspere looked upon her in his early days. The red hair was probably not false, as it afterwards was. The small hand and the white fingers were remarkable enough of themselves; but, sparkling with rings and jewels, the eye rested upon them.

[Elizabeth.]

The young poet, who has been lately sworn her servant, has stood in the backward ranks of the presence-chamber to see his dread mistress pass to chapel. The room is thronged with councillors and courtiers. The inner doors are thrown open, and the gentlemen-pensioners, bearing their gilt battle-axes, appear in long file. The great officers of the household and ministers of state are marshalled in advance. The procession moves. When the Queen appears, sudden and frequent are the genuflexions: "Wherever she turned her face as she was going along, everybody fell down upon their knees." But she is gracious, according to the same authority: "Whoever speaks to her it is kneeling; now and then she raises some with her hand." As she moves into the ante-chapel, loud are the shouts of "Long live Queen Elizabeth." The service is soon ended, and then to dinner. While reverence has been paid to "the only Ruler of princes," forms as reverent in their outward appearance have been offered even to the very place where the creature comforts of our every-day life are to be served up to majesty. Those who cover the table with the cloth kneel three times with the utmost veneration; so do the bearers of

the salt-cellar, of the plate, and of the bread. A countess, dressed in white silk, prostrates herself with the same reverence before the plate, which she rubs with bread and salt. The yeomen of the guard enter, bearing the dishes; and the lady in white silk, with her tasting-knife, presents a portion of each dish to the lips of the yeomen, not in courtesy but in suspicion of poison. The bray of trumpets and the clang of kettle-drums ring through the hall. The Queen is in her inner chamber; and the dishes are borne in by ladies of honour with silent solemnity. When the Queen has eaten, the ladies eat. Brief is the meal on this twenty-eighth of February, for the hall must be cleared for the play.

The platform in the hall at Greenwich, which was to resound with the laments of Arthur, was constructed by a cunning workman, so as to be speedily erected and taken down. It was not so substantial an affair as the "great stage, containing the breadth of the church from the one side to the other," that was built in the noble chapel of King's College, Cambridge, in 1564, for the representation before the Queen of a play of Plautus. Probably in one particular the same arrangement was pursued at Greenwich as at Cambridge on that occasion: "A multitude of the guard had every man in his hand a torch-staff; and the guard stood upon the ground by the stage-side holding their lights." But there would be some space between the stage and the courtly audience. Raised above the rushes would the Queen sit upon a chair of state. Around her would stand her honourable maids. Behind, the eager courtiers with the ready smile when majesty vouchsafed to be pleased. Amongst them is the handsome captain of the guard, the tall and bold Raleigh—he of the high forehead, long face, and small piercing eye.* His head is ever and anon inclined to the chair of Elizabeth. He is "as good as a chorus," and he can tell more of the story than the induction "penned by Nicholas Trotte, gentleman." He has need, however, to tell little as the play proceeds. The plot does not unravel itself; the incidents arise not clearly and naturally; but some worthy person amongst the characters every now and then informs the audience, with extreme politeness and with a most praiseworthy completeness of detail, everything that has happened, and a good deal of what will happen; and thus the unities of time and place are preserved according to the most approved rules, and Mr. Thomas Hughes eschews the offences which were denounced by the lamented Sir Philip Sidney, of having "Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under kingdoms that the player when he comes in must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived."† The author of 'The Misfortunes of Arthur' avoids this by the somewhat drowsy method of substituting the epic narrative for the dramatic action. The Queen whispers to Raleigh that the regular players are more amusing.

A day or two passes on, and her Majesty again wants diversion. She bends

* "He had a most remarkable aspect, an exceeding high forehead, long-faced, and sour eye-lidded—a kind of pig eye."—AUBREY.

† Defence of Poesy.

[Raleigh.]

her mind manfully to public affairs, and it is a high and stirring time; but, if it only be to show her calmness to her people, she will not forego her accustomed revels. Her own players are sent for; and the summons is hasty and peremptory for some fitting novelty. Will the comedy which young Shakspere has written for the Blackfriars, and which has been already in rehearsal, be suited for the Court? The cautious sagacity of old Burbage is willing to confide in it. Without attempting too close an imitation of Court manners, its phrases he conceives are refined, its lines are smooth. There are some slight touches of satire, at which it bethinks him the Queen will laugh: but there is nothing personal, for Don Armado is a Spaniard. The verse, he holds, sounds according to the right stately fashion in the opening of the play:—

> "Let fame that all hunt after in their lives
> Live register'd upon our brazen tombs."

The young poet is a little licentious, however, in the management of his verse as he proceeds; he has not Marlowe's lofty cadences, which roll out so nobly from the full mouth. But the lad will mend. Truly he has a comic vein. If Kempe takes care to utter what is put down for him in Costard, her Majesty will forget poor Tarleton. And then the compliments to the ladies:—

> "They are the books, the arts, the academes,
> That show, contain, and nourish all the world."

Elizabeth will take the compliments to herself. The young man's play shall be "preferred."

It is a bright sparkling morning—"the first mild day of March"—as the Queen's barge waits for Burbage and his fellows at the Blackfriars Stairs. They are soon floating down the tide. Familiar as that scene now is to him, William Shakspere cannot look upon it without wonder and elation of heart. The venerable Bridge, with its hundred legends and traditions; the Tower, where scenes have been acted that haunt his mind, and must be embodied some day for the people's instruction. And now, verses, some of which he has written in the quiet of his beloved Stratford, characters that he has drawn from the stores of his youthful observation, are to be presented for the amusement of a Queen. But with a most modest estimate of his own powers, he is sure that he has heard some very indifferent poetry, which nevertheless has won the Queen's approbation; with many jokes at which the Queen has laughed, that scarcely have seemed to him fitting for royal ears. If his own verses are not listened to, perhaps the liveliness of his little Moth may command a smile. At any rate, there will be some show in his pageant of the Nine Worthies. He will meet the issue courageously.

The Queen's players have now possession of the platform in the Hall. Burbage has ample command of tailors, and of stuff out of the store. Pasteboard and buckram are at his service in abundance. The branches are garnished; the arras is hung. The Queen and her Court are seated. But the experiment of the new play soon ceases to be a doubtful one. Those who can judge, and the Queen is amongst the number, listen with eagerness to something different to the feebleness of the pastoral and mythological stories to which they have been accustomed. "The summer's nightingale"* himself owns that a real poet has arisen, where poetry was scarcely looked for. The Queen commands that rewards, in some eyes more precious than the accustomed gloves, should be bestowed upon her players. Assuredly the delightful comedy of 'Love's Labour's Lost,' containing as it does in every line the evidence of being a youthful work, was very early one of those

> "flights upon the banks of Thames
> That so did take Eliza."

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* Raleigh is so called by Spenser.

NOTE ON HENTZNER'S ACCOUNT OF THE COURT AT GREENWICH.

Paul Hentzner, a man of learning and ability, accompanied a young German nobleman to England, upon a visit of curiosity, in 1598. The account of what he saw is written in Latin; and was translated by Horace Walpole. His description of the Queen and her state at Greenwich is amongst the most curious and authentic records which we possess of that time. It has been often quoted; but it will save the reader trouble if we here copy it:—

"First went gentlemen, barons, earls, knights of the garter, all richly dressed and bareheaded; next came the Chancellor, bearing the seals in a red silk purse, between two; one of which carried the royal sceptre, the other the sword of state, in a red scabbard, studded with golden fleur-de-lis, the point upwards: next came the Queen, in the sixty-fifth year of her age, we are told, very majestic; her face oblong, fair but wrinkled; her eyes small, yet black and pleasant; her nose a little hooked, her lips narrow, and her teeth black (a defect the English seem subject to, from their too great use of sugar); she had in her ears two pearls, with very rich drops; she wore false hair, and that red; upon her head she had a small crown, reported to be made of some of the gold of the celebrated Luxembourg table: her bosom was uncovered, as all the English ladies have it, till they marry; and she had on a necklace of exceeding fine jewels; her hands were small, her fingers long, and her stature neither tall nor low; her air was stately, her manner of speaking mild and obliging. That day she was dressed in white silk, bordered with pearls of the size of beans, and over it a mantle of black silk, shot with silver threads; her train was very long, the end of it borne by a marchioness; instead of a chain she had an oblong collar of gold and jewels. As she went along in all this state and magnificence, she spoke very graciously, first to one, then to another, whether foreign ministers, or those who attended for different reasons, in English, French, and Italian; for, besides being well skilled in Greek, Latin, and the languages I have mentioned, she is mistress of Spanish, Scotch, and Dutch: whoever speaks to her, it is kneeling; now and then she raises some with her hand. While we were there, W. Slawata, a Bohemian baron, had letters to present to her; and she, after pulling off her glove, gave him her right hand to kiss, sparkling with rings and jewels—a mark of particular favour: wherever she turned her face, as she was going along, everybody fell down on their knees. The ladies of the court followed next to her, very handsome and well shaped, and for the most part dressed in white; she was guarded on each side by the gentlemen-pensioners, fifty in number, with gilt battle-axes. In the ante-chapel next the hall where we were, petitions were presented to her, and she received them most graciously, which occasioned the acclamation of 'Long live Queen Elizabeth!' She answered it with, 'I thank you, my good people.' In the chapel was excellent music; as soon as it and the service was over, which scarce exceeded half an hour, the Queen returned in the same state and order, and prepared to go to dinner. But while she was still at prayers, we saw her table set out with the following solemnity:—

"A gentleman entered the room bearing a rod, and along with him another who had a table-cloth, which, after they had both kneeled three times with the utmost veneration, he spread upon the table, and, after kneeling again, they both retired. Then came two others, one with the rod again, the other with a salt-cellar, a plate, and bread; when they had kneeled, as the others had done, and placed what was brought upon the table, they too retired with the same ceremonies performed by the first. At last came an unmarried lady (we were told she was a countess), and along with her a married one, bearing a tasting-knife; the former was dressed in white silk, who, when she had prostrated herself three times in the most graceful manner, approached the table, and rubbed the plates with bread and salt, with as much awe as if the Queen had been present: when they had waited there a little while, the yeomen of the guards entered, bareheaded, clothed in scarlet, with a golden rose upon their backs, bringing in at each turn a course of twenty-four dishes, served in plate, most of it gilt; these dishes were received by a gentleman in the same order they were brought, and placed upon the table, while the lady-taster gave to each of the guard a mouthful to eat of the particular dish he had brought, for fear of any poison. During the time that this guard, which consists of the tallest and stoutest men that can be found in all England, being carefully selected for this service, were bringing dinner, twelve trumpets and two kettle-drums made the hall ring for half an hour together. At the end of all this ceremonial a number of unmarried ladies appeared, who, with particular solemnity, lifted the meat off the table, and conveyed it into the Queen's inner and most private chamber, where, after she had chosen for herself, the rest goes to the ladies of the court."

[Funeral of Sidney.]

CHAPTER III.

THE MIGHTY HEART.

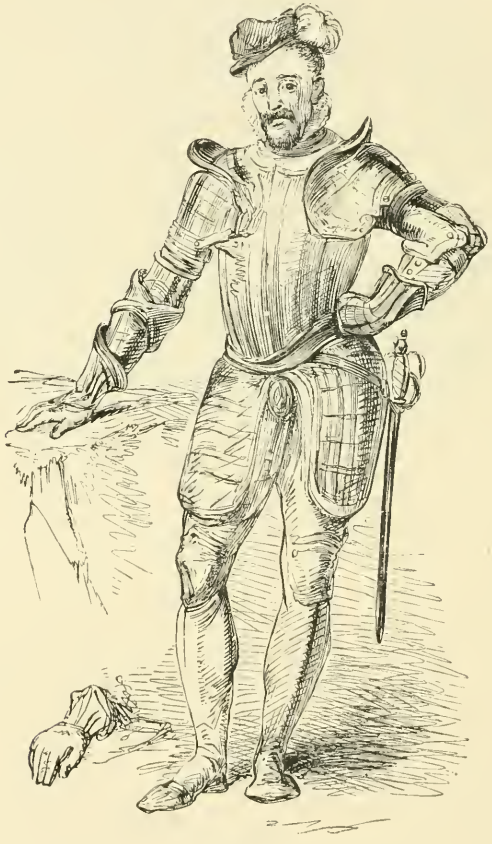
In the spring of 1588, and through the summer also, we may well believe that Shakspere abided in London, whether or not he had his wife and children about him. The course of public events was such that he would scarcely have left the capital, even for a few weeks. For the hearts of all men in the vast city were mightily stirred; and whilst in that "shop of war" might be heard on every side the din of "anvils and hammers waking to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice,"* the poet had his own work to do, in urging forward the noble impulse through which the people, of whatever sect, or whatever party, willed that they would be free. It was the year of the Armada. When Shakspere first exchanged the quiet intercourse of his native

* Milton: 'Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing.'

town for the fierce contests of opinion amongst the partisans of London—he must have had fears for his country. A conspiracy, the most daring and extensive, had burst out against the life of the Queen; and it was the more dangerous that the leaders of the plot were high-minded enthusiasts, who mingled with their traitorous designs the most chivalrous devotion to another Queen, a long-suffering prisoner. The horrible cruelties that attended the execution of Babington and his accomplices aggravated the pity which men felt that so much enthusiasm should have been lost to their country. More astounding events were to follow. In a year of dearth the citizens had banqueted, amidst bells and bonfires, in honour of the detection of Babington and his followers; and now, within three weeks of the feast of Christmas, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, assisted with divers earls, barons, and gentlemen of account, and worshipful citizens "in coats of velvet and chains of gold, all on horseback, in most solemn and stately manner, by sound of four trumpets, about ten of the clock in the forenoon, made open and public proclamation and declaration of the sentence lately given by the nobility against the Queen of Scots under the great seal of England."* At the Cross in Cheap, or at the end of Chancery Lane, or at St. Magnus Corner near London Bridge, would the young sojourner in this seat of policy hear the proclamation: and he would hear also "the great and wonderful rejoicing of the people of all sorts, as manifestly appeared by ringing of bells, making of bonfires, and singing of psalms in every of the streets and lanes of the City."† But amidst this show of somewhat ferocious joy would he encounter gloomy and fear-stricken faces. Men would not dare even to whisper their opinions, but it would be manifest that the public heart was not wholly at ease. On the eighth of February the Queen of Scots is executed. Within a week after London pours forth its multitudes to witness a magnificent and a mournful pageant. The Queen has taken upon herself the cost of the public funeral of Sir Philip Sidney. She has done wisely in this. In honouring the memory of the most gallant and accomplished of her subjects, she diverts the popular mind from unquiet reflections to feelings in which all can sympathise. Even the humblest of the people, who know little of the poetical genius, the taste, the courtesy, the chivalrous bearing of this star of the Court of Elizabeth, know that a young and brave man has fallen in the service of his country. Some of his companions in arms have perhaps told the story of his giving the cup of water, about to be lifted to his own parched lips, to the dying soldier whose necessities were greater than his. And that story indeed would move their tears, far more than all the gallant recollections of the tilt-yard. From the Minorites at the eastern extremity of the City, to St. Paul's, there is a vast procession of authorities in solemn purple; but more impressive is the long column of "certain young men of the City marching by three and three in black cassokins, with their short pikes, halberds, and ensign trailing on the ground." There are in that procession many of the "officers of his foot in the Low Countries" his "gentlemen and yeoman-servants," and twelve "knights of his kindred and friends." One

* Stow's Annals. † Ibid.

there is amongst them upon whom all eyes are gazing—Drake, the bold seaman who has carried the terror of the English flag through every sea, and in afew months will be "singeing the King of Spain's beard." The corpse of Sidney is borne by fourteen of his yeomen; and amongst the pall-bearers is one weeping manly tears, Fulke Greville, upon whose own tomb was written as the climax of his honour that he was "friend to Sir Philip Sidney." The uncle, of the dead hero is there also, the proud, ambitious, weak, and incapable Leicester, who has been kinging it as Governor-General of the Low Countries



[Leicester.]

without the courage to fight a battle, except that in which Sidney was sacrificed. He has been recalled; and is in some disfavour in the courtly circle, although he tried to redeem his disgraces in the Netherlands by boldly counselling the poisoning of the Queen of Scots. Shakspere looks upon the haughty peer, and shudders when he thinks of the murder of Edward Arden.*

* See p. 88.

[Sir Philip Sidney.]

Within a year of the burial of Sidney the popular temper had greatly changed. It had gone forth to all lands that England was to be invaded. Philip of Spain was preparing the greatest armament that the combined navies of Spain and Portugal, of Naples and Sicily, of Genoa and Venice, could bear across the seas, to crush the arch-heretic of England. Rome had blessed the enterprise. Prophecies had been heard in divers languages, that the year 1588 "should be most fatal and ominous unto all estates," and it was "now plainly discovered that England was the main subject of that time's operation."* Yet England did not quail. "The whole commonalty," says the annalist, "became of one heart and mind." The Council of War demanded five thousand men and fifteen ships of the City of London. Two days were craved for answer; and the City replied that ten thousand men and thirty ships were at the service of their country.† In every field around the capital were the citizens who had taken arms practising the usual points of war. The

* Stow's Annals.

† It has been said, in contradiction to the good old historian of London, that the City only gave what the Council demanded; 10,000 men were certainly levied in the twenty-five wards.

Camp at Tilbury was formed. "It was a pleasant sight to behold the soldiers, as they marched towards Tilbury, their cheerful countenances, courageous words and gestures, dancing and leaping wheresoever they came; and in the camp their most felicity was hope of fight with the enemy: where ofttimes divers rumours ran of their foe's approach, and that present battle would be given them; then were they joyful at such news, as if lusty giants were to run a race." There is another description of an eager and confident army that may parallel this:—

"All furnish'd, all in arms:
All plum'd, like estridges that with the wind
Bated,—like eagles having lately bath'd;
Glittering in golden coats, like images;
As full of spirit as the month of May,
And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer:
Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls."*

* Henry IV., Part I., Act IV., Scene I.

[Camp at Tilbury.]

He who wrote this description had, we think, looked upon the patriot train-bands of London in 1588. But, if we mistake not, he had given an impulse to the spirit which had called forth this "strong and mighty preparation," in a voice as trumpet-tongued as the proclamations of Elizabeth. The chronology of Shakspere's King John is amongst the many doubtful points of his literary career. The authorship of the 'King John' in two Parts is equally doubtful. But if that be an older play than Shakspere's, and be not, as the Germans believe with some reason, written by Shakspere himself, the drama which we receive as his is a work peculiarly fitted for the year of the great Armada. The other play is full of matter that would have offended the votaries of the old religion. This, in a wise spirit of toleration, attacks no large classes of men —excites no prejudices against friars and nuns, but vindicates the independence of England against the interference of the papal authority, and earnestly exhorts her to be true to herself. This was the spirit in which even the undoubted adherents of the ancient forms of religion acted while England lay under the ban of Rome in 1588. The passages in Shakspere's King John appear to us to have even a more pregnant meaning, when they are connected with that stirring time :—

"*K. John.* What earthly name to interrogatories
Can task the free breath of a sacred king?
Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy, and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the pope.
Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England
Add thus much more,—that no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;
But as we under Heaven are supreme head,
So under Him, that great supremacy,
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand:
So tell the pope; all reverence set apart
To him and his usurp'd authority.

K. Phil. Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

K. John. Though you, and all the kings of Christendom,
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,
Dreading the curse that money may buy out;
And, by the merit of vile gold, dross, dust,
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,
Who, in that sale, sells pardon from himself;
Though you, and all the rest, so grossly led,
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish;
Yet I, alone, alone do me oppose
Against the pope, and count his friends my foes."

. . . . .

"*K. John.* The legate of the pope hath been with me,
And I have made a happy peace with him;
And he hath promised to dismiss the powers
Led by the dauphin.

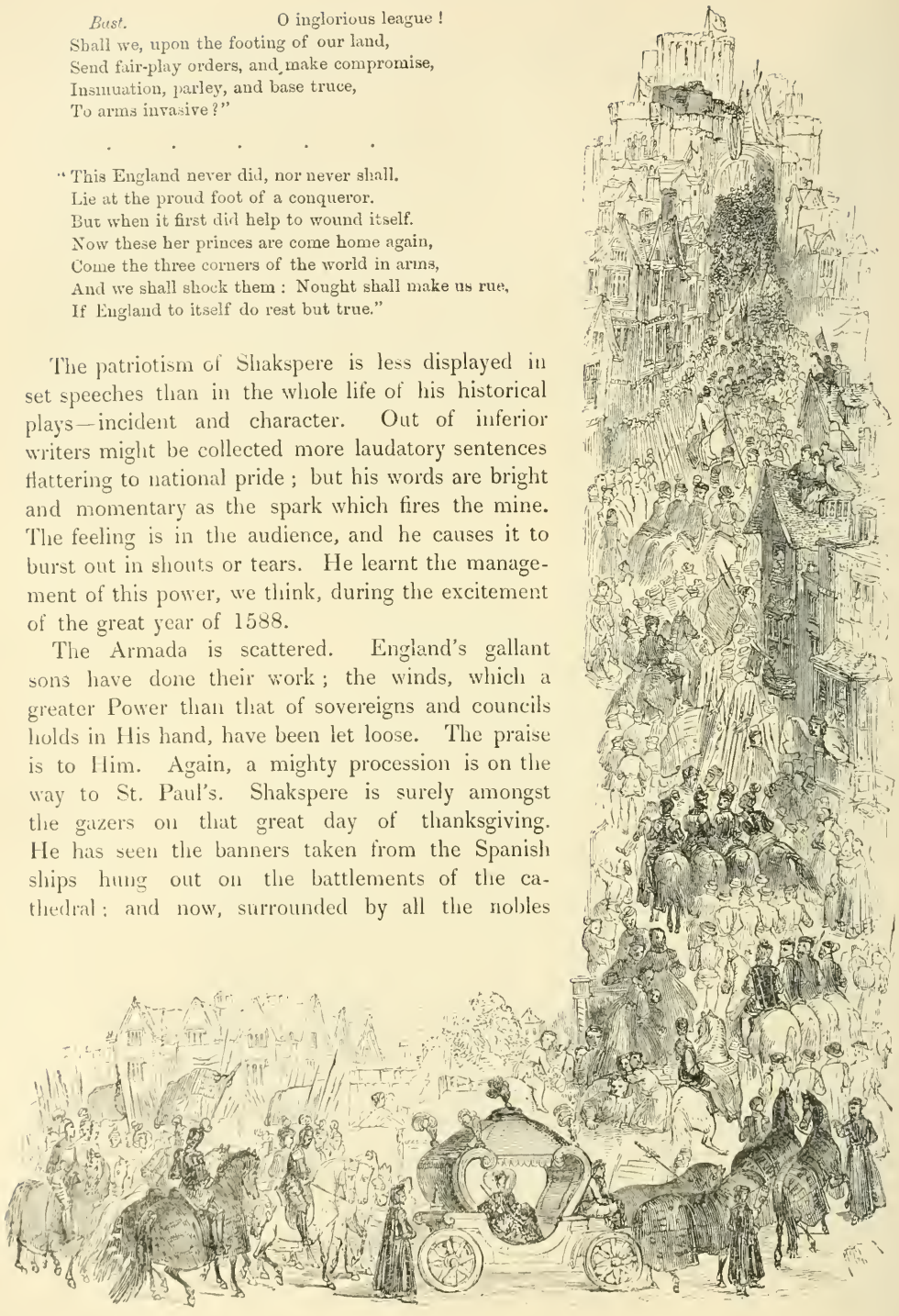
Bust. O inglorious league!
Shall we, upon the footing of our land,
Send fair-play orders, and make compromise,
Insinuation, parley, and base truce,
To arms invasive?"

. . . . .

"This England never did, nor never shall.
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror.
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them: Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true."

The patriotism of Shakspere is less displayed in set speeches than in the whole life of his historical plays—incident and character. Out of inferior writers might be collected more laudatory sentences flattering to national pride; but his words are bright and momentary as the spark which fires the mine. The feeling is in the audience, and he causes it to burst out in shouts or tears. He learnt the management of this power, we think, during the excitement of the great year of 1588.

The Armada is scattered. England's gallant sons have done their work; the winds, which a greater Power than that of sovereigns and councils holds in His hand, have been let loose. The praise is to Him. Again, a mighty procession is on the way to St. Paul's. Shakspere is surely amongst the gazers on that great day of thanksgiving. He has seen the banners taken from the Spanish ships hung out on the battlements of the cathedral; and now, surrounded by all the nobles



and mighty men who have fought her battles, the Queen descends from her "chariot throne" to make her "hearty prayers on her bended knees." Leicester, the favourite to whose weak hand was nominally intrusted the command of the troops, has not lived to see this triumph. But Essex, the new favourite, would be there; and Hunsdon, the General for the Queen. There too would be Raleigh, and Hawkins, and Frobisher, and Drake, and Howard of Effingham—one

[Howard.]

who forgot all distinctions of sect in the common danger of his country. Well might the young poet thus apostrophize this country!—

"This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress, built by Nature for herself,
Against infestion and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

[Drake.]

But, glorious as was the contemplation of the attitude of England during the year of the Armada, the very energy that had called forth this noble display of patriotic spirit exhibited itself in domestic controversy when the pressure from without was removed. The poet might then, indeed, qualify his former admiration :—

> "O England! model to thy inward greatness,
> Like little body with a mighty heart,
> What mightst thou do that honour would thee do,
> Were all thy children kind and natural!"

The same season that witnessed the utter destruction of the armament of Spain saw London excited to the pitch of fury by polemical disputes. It was not now the quarrel between Protestant and Romanist, but between the National Church and Puritanism. The theatres, those new and powerful teachers, lent themselves to the controversy. In some of these their licence to entertain the people was abused by the introduction of matters connected with religion and politics; so that in 1589 Lord Burghley not only directed the Lord Mayor to inquire what companies of players had offended, but a commission was appointed for the same purpose. How Shakspere's company proceeded during this inquiry has been made out most clearly by the valuable document discovered at Bridgewater House by Mr. Collier, wherein they disclaim to have conducted themselves amiss. "These are to certify your right Honourable Lordships that her Majesty's poor players, James Burbage, Richard Burbage, John Lanehame, Thomas Greene, Robert Wilson, John Taylor, Anth. Wadeson, Thomas Pope, George Peele, Augustine Phillipps, Nicholas Towley, William Shakespeare, William Kempe, William Johnson, Baptiste Coodale, and

Robert Armyn, being all of them sharers in the Blackfriars playhouse, have never given cause of displeasure, in that they have brought into their plays matters of state and religion, unfit to be handled by them or to be presented before lewd spectators: neither hath any complaint in that kind ever been preferred against them or any of them. Wherefore they trust most humbly in your Lordships' consideration of their former good behaviour, being at all times ready and willing to yield obedience to any command whatsoever your Lordships in your wisdom may think in such case meet," &c.

"Nov. 1589."

In this petition, Shakspere, a sharer in the theatre, but with others below him in the list, says, and they all say, that "they have never brought into their plays matters of state and religion." The public mind in 1589-90 was furiously agitated by "matters of state and religion." A controversy was going on which is now known as that of *Martin Marprelate*, in which the constitution and discipline of the Church were most furiously attacked in a succession of pamphlets; and they were defended with equal violence and scurrility. Izaak Walton says,—"There was not only one Martin Marprelate, but other venomous books daily printed and dispersed, — books that were so absurd and scurrilous, that the graver divines disdained them an answer." Walton adds,—"And yet these were grown into high esteem with the common people, till Tom Nash appeared against them all, who was a man of a sharp wit, and the master of a scoffing, satirical, merry pen." Connected with this controversy, there was subsequently a more personal one between Nash and Gabriel Harvey; but they were each engaged in the Marprelate dispute. John Lyly was the author of one of the most remarkable pamphlets produced on this occasion, called 'Pap with a Hatchet.' Harvey, it must be observed, was the intimate friend of Spenser; and in a pamphlet which he dates from Trinity Hall, November 5, 1589, he thus attacks the author of 'Pap with a Hatchet,' the more celebrated Euphuist, whom Sir Walter Scott's novel has made familiar to us:—

"I am threatened with a bable, and Martin menaced with a comedy—a fit motion for a jester and a player to try what may be done by employment of his faculty. Bables and comedies are parlous fellows to decipher and discourage men (that is the point) with their witty flouts and learned jerks, enough to lash any man out of countenance. Nay, if you shake the painted scabbard at me, I have done; and all you that tender the preservation of your good names were best to please Pap-Hatchet, and fee Euphues betimes, for fear lest he be moved, or some one of his apes hired, to make a play of you, and then is your credit quite undone for ever and ever. Such is the public reputation of their plays. He must needs be discouraged whom they decipher. Better anger an hundred other than two such that have the stage at commandment, and can furnish out vices and devils at their pleasure." *

We thus see that Harvey, the friend of Spenser, is threatened by one of those who "have the stage at commandment" with having a play made of him.

* Pierce's 'Supererogation.' Reprinted in 'Archaica,' p. 137.

Such plays were made in 1589, and Nash thus boasts of them in one of his tracts printed in 1589:—"Methought *Vetus Comœdia* began to prick him at London in the right vein, when he brought forth divinity with a scratched face, holding of her heart as if she were sick, because Martin would have forced her; but missing of his purpose, he left the print of his nails upon her cheeks, and poisoned her with a vomit, which he ministered unto her to make her cast up her dignities." Lyly, taking the same side, writes,—"Would those *comedies* might be allowed to be played that are penned, and then I am sure he [Martin Marprelate] would be *deciphered*, and so perhaps *discouraged*." Here are the very words which Harvey has repeated,—"He must needs be *discouraged* whom they *decipher*." Harvey, in a subsequent passage of the same tract, refers to this prostitution of the stage to party purposes in very striking words:—"The stately tragedy scorneth the trifling comedy, *and the trifling comedy flouteth the new ruffianism*." These circumstances appear to us very remarkable, with reference to the state of the drama about 1590. Shakspere's great contemporary, Edmund Spenser, in a poem entitled 'The Tears of the Muses,' originally published in 1591, describes, in the 'Complaint' of Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, the state of the drama at the time in which he is writing:—

"Where be the sweet delights of learning's treasure,
That wont with comic sock to beautify
The painted theatres, and fill with pleasure
The listeners' eyes, and ears with melody;
In which I late was wont to reign as queen,
And mask in mirth with graces well beseen?

O! all is gone; and all that goodly glee,
Which wont to be the glory of gay wits,
Is laid a-bed, and nowhere now to see;
And in her room unseemly Sorrow sits,
With hollow brows and grissly countenance,
Marring my joyous gentle dalliance.

And him beside sits ugly Barbarism,
And brutish Ignorance, yerept of late
Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm,
Where being bred, he light and heaven does hate;
They in the minds of men now tyrannize,
And the fair scene with rudeness foul disguise.

All places they with folly have possess'd,
And with vain toys the vulgar entertain;
But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilom wont to wait upon my train,
Fine Counterfesance, and unhurtful Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort."

Spenser was in England in 1590-91, and it is probable that 'The Tears of the Muses' was written in 1590, and that the poet described the prevailing state of the drama in London during the time of his visit.

The four stanzas which we have quoted are descriptive, as we think, of a

period of the drama when it had emerged from the semi-barbarism by which it was characterized, "from the commencement of Shakspere's boyhood, till about the earliest date at which his removal to London can be possibly fixed." * This description has nothing in common with those accounts of the drama which have reference to this "semi-barbarism." Nor does the writer of it belong to the school which considered a violation of the unities of time and place as the great defect of the English theatre. Nor does he assert his preference of the classic school over the romantic, by objecting, as Sir Philip Sidney objects, that "plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns." There had been, according to Spenser, a state of the drama that would

> "Fill with pleasure
> The listeners' eyes, and ears with melody."

Can any comedy be named, if we assume that Shakspere had, in 1590, not written any, which could be celebrated—and by the exquisite versifier of 'The Fairy Queen'—for its "melody"? Could any also be praised for

> "That goodly glee
> Which wont to be the glory of gay wits"?

Could the plays before Shakspere be described by the most competent of judges—the most poetical mind of that age next to Shakspere—as abounding in

> "Fine Counterfesance, and unhurtful Sport,
> Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort"?

We have not seen such a comedy, except some three or four of Shakspere's, which could have existed before 1590. We do not believe there is such a comedy from any other pen. What, according to the 'Complaint' of Thalia, has banished such comedy? "Unseemly Sorrow," it appears, has been fashionable;—not the proprieties of tragedy, but a Sorrow

> "With *hollow brows* and *grissly* countenance;"—

the violent scenes of blood which were offered for the excitement of the multitude, before the tragedy of real art was devised. But this state of the drama is shortly passed over. There is something more defined. By the side of this false tragic sit "ugly Barbarism and brutish Ignorance." These are not the barbarism and ignorance of the *old* stage;—they are

> "Yerept *of late*
> Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm."

They "*now* tyrannize;" they now "disguise" the fair scene "with *rudeness*." The Muse of Tragedy, Melpomene, had previously described the "rueful spectacles" of "the stage." It was a stage which had no "true tragedy." But it *had* possessed

> "Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort."

Now "the trifling comedy flouteth *the new ruffianism*." The words of Gabriel

* Edinburgh Review, vol. lxxi., p. 469.

Harvey and Edmund Spenser agree in this. The bravos that "have the stage at commandment can furnish out vices and devils at their pleasure," says Harvey. This describes the *Vetus Comœdia*—the old comedy—of which Nash boasts. Can there be any doubt that Spenser had this state of things in view when he denounced the

> "Ugly *Barbarism*,
> And brutish *Ignorance*, ycrept of late
> Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm"?

He denounced it in common with his friend Harvey, who, however he partook of the controversial violence of his time, was a man of learning and eloquence; and to whom only three years before he had addressed a sonnet, of which the highest mind in the country might have been proud.

But we must return to the 'Thalia.' The four stanzas which we have quoted are immediately followed by these four others :—

> "All these, and all that else the comic stage
> With season'd wit and goodly pleasure graced,
> By which man's life in his likest image
> Was limned forth, are wholly now defaced;
> And those sweet wits, which wont the like to frame,
> Are now despised, and made a laughing game.
>
> And he, the man whom Nature self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
> With kindly counter, under mimic shade,
> Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late:
> With whom all joy and jolly merriment
> Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.
>
> Instead thereof scoffing Scurrility,
> And scornful Folly, with Contempt, is crept,
> Rolling in rhymes of shameless ribaldry,
> Without regard or due decorum kept;
> Each idle wit at will presumes to make,
> And doth the Learned's task upon him take.
>
> But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
> Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
> Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
> Which dare their follies forth so rashly throw,
> Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to mockery to sell."

Here there is something even stronger than what has preceded it, in the direct allusion to the state of the stage in 1590. Comedy had ceased to be an exhibition of "seasoned wit" and "goodly pleasure;" it no longer showed "man's life in his likest image." Instead thereof there was "Scurrility"—'scornful Folly"—"shameless Ribaldry;"—and "each idle wit"

> "doth the Learned's task upon him take."

It was the task of "the Learned" to deal with the high subjects of religious controversy—the "matters of state and religion," with which the stage had meddled. Harvey had previously said, in the tract quoted by us, it is "a godly motion, when *interluders* leave penning their pleasureable plays to become zealous ecclesiastical writers." He calls Lyly more expressly, with reference to this meddling, "the foolmaster of the theatre." In this state of things the acknowledged head of the comic stage was silent for a time:—

> "He, the man whom Nature self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
> With *kindly* counter, under mimic shade,
> Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late."

And the author of 'The Fairy Queen' adds,

> "But that same *gentle* spirit, from whose pen
> Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
> Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
> Which dare their follies forth so madly throw,
> Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to *mockery* to sell."

The love of personal abuse had driven out real comedy; and there was *one* who for a brief season had left the madness to take its course. We cannot doubt that

> "He, the man whom Nature self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,"

was *William Shakspere*. Mr. Collier, in his 'History of Dramatic Poetry,' says of Spenser's 'Thalia,'—"Had it not been certain that it was written at so early a date, and that Shakespeare *could not then* have exhibited his talents and acquired reputation, we should say at once that it could be meant for no other poet. It reads like a prophetic anticipation, which could not have been fulfilled by Shakspere until several years after it was published." Mr. Collier, when he wrote this, had not discovered the document which proves that Shakspere was a sharer in the Blackfriars Theatre at least a year before this poem was published. Spenser, we believe, described a real man, and real facts. He made no "prophetic anticipation;" there had been genuine comedy in existence; the ribaldry had driven it out for a season. The poem has reference to some *temporary* degradation of the stage; and what this temporary degradation was is most exactly defined by the public documents of the period, and the writings of Harvey, Nash, and Lyly. The dates of all these proofs correspond with minute exactness. And who then is "*our pleasant Willy*," according to the opinion of those who would deny to Shakspere the title to the praise of the other great poet of the Elizabethan age? It is *John Lyly*, says Malone—the man whom Spenser's bosom friend was, at the same moment, denouncing as "the foolmaster of the theatre." We say, advisedly, that there is *absolutely no proof* that Shakspere had *not* written The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The

Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, The Taming of the Shrew, and All's Well that Ends Well, amongst his comedies, before 1590: we believe that he alone merited the high praise of Spenser; that it was meant for him.*

* This argument was originally advanced by us in a small Life of Shakspere; and we here repeat it, with slight alteration.

[Spenser.]

[Richmond.]

CHAPTER IV.

HOW CHANCES IT THEY TRAVEL.

JOHN STANHOPE, one of the gentlemen of the Privy Chamber, writes thus to Lord Talbot, in December, 1589:—"The Queen is so well as, I assure you, six or seven galliards in a morning, besides music and singing, is her ordinary exercise."* This letter is dated from Richmond. The magnificent palace which the grandfather of Elizabeth erected upon the ruins of the old palace of the Plantagenets was a favourite residence of the Queen. Here, where she danced her galliards, and made the courts harmonious with her music, she closed her life some ten years after,—not quite so deserted as was the great Edward upon the same spot, but the victim, in all probability, of blighted affections and unavailing regrets. Scarcely a vestige is now left of the second palace of Richmond. The splendid towers of Henry VII. have fallen, but the

* 'Lodge's Illustrations,' 4to., vol. ii., page 411.

name which he gave to the site endures, and the natural beauty which fixed here the old sovereigns of England, and which the people of all lands still come to gaze upon, is something which outlives the works of man, if not the memory of those works. In the Christmas of 1589, the Queen's players would be necessarily busy for the diversion of the Court. The records are lost which would show us at this period what were the precise performances offered to the Queen; and the imperfect registers of the Council, which detail certain payments for plays, do not at this date refer to payments to Shakspere's company. But there can be little doubt that the Lord Chamberlain's servants were more frequently called upon for her Majesty's solace than the Lord Admiral's men, or Lord Strange's men, or the Earl of Warwick's men, to whom payments are recorded at this period. It is impossible that the registers of the Council, as published originally by Chalmers, should furnish a complete account of the theatrical performances at Court; for there is no entry of any payment whatever for such performances, under the Council's warrant, between the 11th of March, 1593, and the 27th of November, 1597. The office-books of the Treasurers of the Chamber exhibit a greater blank at this time. We can have no doubt that the last decade of the sixteenth century was the most brilliant period of the regal patronage of the drama; the period when Shakspere, especially,

"Made those flights upon the banks of Thames"

to which Jonson has so emphatically alluded. That Shakspere was familiar with Richmond we can well believe. He and his fellows would unquestionably, at the holiday seasons of Christmas and Shrovetide, be at the daily command of the Lord Chamberlain, and in attendance upon the Court wherever the Queen chose to dwell. The servants of the household, the ladies waiting upon the Queen, and even the great officers composing the Privy Council, seem to have been in a perpetual state of migration from palace to palace. Elizabeth carried this desire for change of place to an extent that was not the most agreeable to many of her subjects. Her progress from house to house, with a cloud of retainers, was almost ruinous to some who were yet unable to reject the honour. But even the frequent removals of the Court from palace to palace must have been productive of no little annoyance to the grave and the delicate amongst the royal attendants. The palaces were ill-furnished; and whenever the whim of a moment directed a removal, many of the heavier household necessaries had to be carried from palace to palace by barge or waggon. In the time of Henry VIII. we constantly find charges attendant upon these removals.* Gifford infers that in the time of which we are writing, the practice was sufficiently common and remarkable to have afforded us one of our most significant and popular words: "To the smutty regiment, who attended the progresses, and rode in the carts with the pots and kettles, which, with every other article of furniture, were then moved from palace to palace, the people, in derision, gave the name of *black* guards,—a term since become sufficiently familiar, and never properly explained."† The palaces themselves were most inconveniently

* See Nicolas's 'Privy Purse Expenses of King Henry the Eighth.'

† Note to 'Every Man out of his Humour.'

[St. James's.]

adapted for these changes. Wherever the Queen was, there was the seat of government. The Privy Council were in daily attendance upon the Queen; and every public document is dated from the Court. Official business of the most important nature had to be transacted in bedchambers and passages. Lady Mary Sidney, whose husband was Lord President of Wales, writes the most moving letter to an officer of the Lord Chamberlain, to implore him to beg his principal "to have some other room than my chamber for my lord to have his resort unto, as he was wont to have, or else my lord will be greatly troubled when he shall have any matters of dispatch; my lodging, you see, being very little, and myself continually sick, and not able to be much out of my bed."* A great officer of state being obliged to transact business with his servants and suitors in his sick wife's bedroom, is a tolerable example of the inconvenient arrangements of our old palaces. Perhaps a more striking example of their want of comfort, and even of decent convenience, is to be found in a memorial from the maids of honour, which we have seen in the State Paper Office, humbly requesting that the partition which separates their sleeping-rooms from the common passage may be somewhat raised, so as to shut them out from the possible gaze of her Majesty's gallant pages. If Windsor was thus inconvenient as a permanent residence, how must the inconvenience have been doubled when the Queen suddenly migrated here from St. James's, or Somerset Place, or Greenwich? The smaller palaces of Nonsuch and Richmond were

* The letter is given in Malone's 'Inquiry,' p. 91.

probably still less endurable. But they were all the seats of gaiety, throwing a veil over fears and jealousies and feverish ambition. Our business is not with their real tragedies.

From about the period of Shakspere's first connection with the stage, and thence with the Court, Henry Lord Hunsdon, the kinsman of Elizabeth, was Lord Chamberlain. It is remarkable, that when Burbage erected the Blackfriars Theatre, in 1576, close by the houses of Lord Hunsdon and of the famous Ratcliffe, Earl of Sussex, Lord Hunsdon was amongst the petitioners against the project of Burbage. But the Earl of Sussex, who was then Lord Chamberlain, did not petition against the erection of a playhouse; and he may therefore be supposed to have approved of it. The opinions, however, of Lord Hunsdon must have undergone some considerable change; for upon his succeeding to the office of Lord Chamberlain upon the death of Sussex, he became the patron of Shakspere's company. They were the Lord Chamberlain's men; or, in other words, the especial servants of the Court. Henry Lord Hunsdon held this office for eleven years, till his death in 1596. Elizabeth bestowed

[Lord Hunsdon.]

[Somerset House.]

upon him as a residence the magnificent palace of the Protector Somerset Here, in the halls which had been raised out of the spoliation of the great Priory of St. John of Jerusalem, would the company of Shakspere be frequently engaged. The Queen occasionally made the palace her residence; and it can scarcely be doubted that on these occasions there was revelry upon which the genius of the new dramatic poet, so immeasurably above all his compeers, would bestow a grace which a few years earlier seemed little akin to the spirit of the drama. That palace also is swept away; and the place which once witnessed the stately measure and the brisk galliard—where Cupids shook their painted wings in the solemn masque—and where, above all, our great dramatic poet may first have produced his Comedy of Errors, his Two Gentlemen of Verona, his Romeo and Juliet, and have been rewarded with smiles and tears, such as seldom were bestowed in the chill regions of state and etiquette, — that place now sees the complicated labours of the routine departments of a mighty government constantly progressing in their prosaic uniformity. No contrast can be more striking than the Somerset House of Queen Elizabeth's Lord Chamberlain, and the Somerset House of Queen Victoria's Commissioners of Stamps and Taxes.

"How chances it they travel?" says Hamlet, speaking of the players —
Their residence both in reputation and profit was better both ways." Ham-

let's "tragedians of the city" travel because "the boys carry it away." But there were other causes that more than once forced Shakspere's company to disperse, and which affected also every other company. That terrible affliction from which England has so long been free, the plague, almost invariably broke up the residence of the players. They were in general scattered about the country seeking a precarious maintenance, whilst their terror-stricken families remained in the fated city. In the autumn of 1592 the plague raged in London. Michaelmas term was kept at Hertford; as in 1593 it was at St. Albans. During this long period all the theatres were closed, the Privy Council justly alleging "that infected people, after their long keeping in and before they be cleared of their disease and infection, being desirous of recreation, use to resort to such assemblies, where through heat and throng they infect many sound persons." In the letters of Alleyn the player, which are preserved in Dulwich College, there is one to his wife, of this exact period, being dated from Chelmsford, the 2nd of May, 1593, which exhibits a singular picture of the indignities to which the less privileged players appear to have been subjected:—"I have no news to send thee, but I thank God we are all well, and in health, which I pray God to continue with us in the country, and with you in London. But, mouse, I little thought to hear that which I now hear by you, for it is well known, they say, that you were by my Lord Mayor's officers made to ride in a cart, you and all your fellows, which I am sorry to hear; but you may thank your two supporters, your strong legs I mean, that would not carry you away, but let you fall into the hands of such termagants."* On the 1st of September, 1592, there was a company of players at Cambridge, and, as it appears, engaged in a contest with the University authorities. On that day the Vice-Chancellor issues a warrant to the constable forbidding the inhabitants to allow the players to occupy any houses, rooms, or yards, for the purpose of exhibiting their interludes, plays, and tragedies. The players, however, disregarded the warrant; for on the 8th of September, the Vice-Chancellor complains to the Privy Council that "certain light persons, *pretending themselves to be her Majesty's players*, &c., did take boldness, not only here to proclaim their interludes (by setting up of writings about our college gates), but also actually at Chesterton to play the same, which is a village within the compass of the jurisdiction granted to us by her Majesty's charter, and situated hard by the plot where Stourbridge fair is kept." The Privy Council does not appear to have been in a hurry to redress the grievance; for ten days afterwards the Vice-Chancellor and various heads of colleges repeated the complaint, alleging that the offenders were supported by Lord North (who resided at Kirtling, near Cambridge), who said "in the hearing as well of the players, as of divers knights and gentlemen of the shire then present," that an order of the Privy Council of 1575, forbidding the performance of plays in the neighbourhood of universities, "was no perpetuity." It was not till the following year that the Privy Council put an end to this unseemly contest, by renewing the letters of 1575. The company of Shakspere was not, we apprehend, the "certain light persons, pretending them-

* Collier's 'Memoirs of Edward Alleyn,' p. 24.

selves to be her Majesty's players." The complaint of the Vice-Chancellor recites that one Dutton was a principal amongst them; and Dutton's company is mentioned in the accounts of the Revels as early as 1572. But for this notice of Dutton we might have concluded that the Queen's players were the company to which Shakspere belonged; and that his acquaintance with Cambridge, its splendid buildings, and its noble institutions, was to be associated with the memory of a dispute that is little creditable to those who resisted the just exercise of the authority of the University. The Queen and her courtiers appear to have looked upon this contest in something of the spirit of mischievous drollery. Three months after the dispute, Dr. John Still, then Vice-Chancellor, Master of Trinity College, and Bishop of Bath and Wells, writes thus to the Lords of the Council: "Upon Saturday last, being the second of December, we received letters from Mr. Vice-Chamberlain by a messenger sent purposely, wherein, by reason that her Majesty's own servants in this time of infection may not disport her Highness with their wonted and ordinary pastimes, his Honour hath moved our University (as he writeth that he hath also done the other of Oxford) to prepare a comedy in English, to be acted before her Highness by some of our students in this time of Christmas. How ready we are to do anything that may tend to her Majesty's pleasure, we are very desirous by all means to testify; but how fit we shall be by this is moved, having no practice in this English vein,* and being (as we think) nothing beseeming our

* The English vein had gone out of use. In 1564, 'Ezekias,' a comedy in English by Dr. Nicholas Udall, was performed before Elizabeth in King's College Chapel.

Ancient View of Cambridge.

students, specially out of the University, we much doubt; and do find our principal actors (whom we have of purpose called before us) very unwilling to play in English."* If Dr. Still were the author of 'Gammer Gurton's Needle,' as commonly believed, the joke is somewhat heightened; but at any rate it is diverting enough, as a picture of manners, to find the University who have opposed the performances of professional players, being called upon to produce a play in the "English vein," a species of composition mostly held in contempt by the learned as fitted only for the ignorant multitude.

In relation to Shakspere, we learn from these transactions at Cambridge, that at the Christmas of 1592 there were no revels at Court: "her Majesty's own servants in this time of infection may not disport her Highness with their wonted and ordinary pastimes." Shakspere, we may believe, during the long period of the continuance of the plague in London, had no occupation at the Blackfriars Theatre; and the pastimes of the Lord Chamberlain's servants were dispensed with at the palaces. It is probable that he was residing at his own Stratford. The leisure, we think, afforded him opportunity of preparing the most important of that wonderful series of historical dramas which unquestionably appeared within a few years of this period; and of producing some other dramatic compositions of the highest order of poetical excellence. The accounts of the Chamberlains of Stratford exhibit no payments to players from 1587 to 1592; but in that year in the account of Henry Wilson, the Chamberlain, we have the entry of "Paid to the Queenes players XXs," and a similar entry occurs in the account of John Sadler, Chamberlain in 1593. Were these payments to the Lord Chamberlain's company, known familiarly as the Queen's players? We cannot absolutely decide. Another company was at Cambridge *pretending* to be the Queen's players; and in the office book of the Treasurer of the Chamber, in 1590, there is the record of a payment "to Lawrance Dutton and John Dutton, her Majesty's players, and their company." The Lord Chamberlain's players appear to have ceased to be called "the Queen's players," about this time. Upon the whole, we are inclined to the belief,—although we have previously assumed that the Queen's players who performed at Stratford in 1587 were Shakspere's fellows,†—that the Lord Chamberlain's servants did not "travel." If the "profit" of their "residence" in London was interrupted by the plague, it did not consist with their "reputation" to seek out the scanty remuneration of uncritical country audiences. It appears to us, also, looking at the poetical labours of Shakspere at this exact period, that there was some pause in his professional occupation; and that many months' residence in Stratford, from the autumn of 1592 to the summer of 1593, enabled him more systematically to cultivate those higher faculties which placed him, even in the opinion of his contemporaries, at the head of the living poets of England.‡

One of the peculiar characteristics of the genius of Shakspere consists in its essentially practical nature—its perfect adaptation to the immediate purpose of its employment. It is not inconsistent, therefore, with the most unlimited re-

* The various documents may be consulted in Collier's 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. i.

† See page 281. ‡ See note at the end of this chapter.

verence for the higher qualities of that genius, to believe that in its original direction to the drama it was guided by no very abstract ideas of excellence, but sought to accommodate itself to the taste and the information of the people, and to deal only with what was to them obvious and familiar. It is thus that we may readily admit that many of the earliest plays of Shakspere were founded upon some rude production of the primitive stage. Andronicus had, no doubt, its dramatic ancestor, who exhibited the same Gothic view of Roman history, and whose scenes of blood were equally agreeable to an audience requiring strong excitement. Pericles, however remodelled at an after period, belonged, we can scarcely doubt, to Shakspere's first efforts for the improvement of some popular dramatic exhibition which he found ready to his hand. So of The Taming of the Shrew, of which we may without any violence assume that a common model existed both for that and for the other play with a very similar name, which appears to belong to the same period. It is in the highest degree probable that the three parts of Henry VI. may in the same manner be founded upon older productions; but it is utterly inconsistent with our confidence in the originality of Shakspere's powers, even when dealing with old materials, to believe that those plays which we know as the two parts of The Contention between the Houses of York and Lancaster, were *the* plays upon which Shakspere founded the second and third parts of Henry VI. They are as much his own as the Hamlet of 1603 is his own, or the Henry V. of 1600, or the Merry Wives of 1602, each of which is evidently the sketch, and perhaps the mutilated sketch, of the finished picture which was subsequently delivered to us. That sketch of Hamlet, which in all probability was the remodelling of something earlier from the same pen (which earliest piece might even have been founded upon some rude dialogue or dumb show of a murder or a ghost), proves to us, comparing it with the finished play, the quarto of 1604, how luxuriantly the vigorous sapling went on year by year to grow into the monarch of the forest. But from the first, Shakspere, with that consummate judgment which gave a fitness to every thing that he did, or proposed to do, held his genius in subjection to the apprehension of the people, till he felt secure of their capability to appreciate the highest excellence. In his case, as in that of every great artist, perfection could only be attained by repeated efforts. He had no models to work upon; and in the very days in which he lived the English drama began to be created. It was not "Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes" which "first rear'd the stage," but a singular combination of circumstances which for the most part grew out of the reformation of religion. He took the thing as he found it. The dramatic power was in him so supreme that, compared with the feebler personifications of other men, it looks like instinct. He seized upon the vague abstractions which he found in the histories and comedies of the Blackfriars and the Bel Savage, and the scene was henceforth filled with living beings. But not as yet were these individualities surrounded with the glowing atmosphere of burning poetry. The philosophy which invests their sayings with an universal wisdom, that enters the mind and becomes its loadstar, was scarcely yet evoked out of that

profound contemplation of human actions and of the higher things dimly revealed in human nature, which belonged to the maturity of his wondrous mind. The wit was there in some degree from the first, for it was irrepressible; but it was then as the polished metal, which dazzlingly gives back the brightness of the sunbeams; in after times it was as the diamond, which reflects everything, and yet appears to be self-irradiated in its lustrous depths. If these qualities, and if the humour which seems more especially the ripened growth of the mental faculty, could have been produced in the onset of Shakspere's career, it is probable that the career would not have been a successful one. He had to make his audience. He himself has told us of a play of his earliest period, that "I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviarie to the general: but it was (as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine) an excellent play; well digested in the scenes: set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember, one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury; nor no matter in the phrase that might indite the author of affectation; but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine."* Was this play an attempt of Shakspere himself to depart from the popular track? If it were, we probably owe much to the million.

Let us place then the Shakspere of eight-and-twenty once more in the solitude of Stratford, with the experience of seven years in the pursuits which he has chosen as his profession. He has produced, we believe, several plays belonging to each class of the drama with which the early audiences were familiar. In the tragedy of Andronicus, as it has come down to us, and with great probability in the first conceptions of Hamlet and of Romeo and Juliet, the physical horrors of the scene were as much relied upon as attractions, if not more so, than the poetry and characterization. The struggles for the empery of France, and the wars of the Roses, had been presented to the people with marvellous animation; but the great dramatic principle of unity of idea had been but imperfectly developed, and probably, without the practice of that apprentice-period of the poet's dramatic life, would scarcely have been conceived in its ultimate perfection. Comedy, too, had been tried; and here the rude wit and the cumbrous affectations of his contemporaries had been supplanted by drollery and nature, with a sprinkle of graceful poetry whose essential characteristic is the rejection of the unnatural ornament and the conventional images which belong to every other dramatic writer of the period. The Two Gentlemen of Verona, the Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, The Taming of the Shrew, and All 's Well that Ends Well, are essentially nobler and purer in their poetical elements than anything that Peele, or Greene, or Lyly, or Lodge, have bequeathed to us. That they are superior in many respects to many of the best productions of Shakspere's later contemporaries may be the result of the after-polish which we have no doubt the poet bestowed even upon his least important works. They, with the histories and tragedies we have named, essentially

* Hamlet, Act II., Sc. II.

belonged, we think, to his earliest period. We are about to enter upon the career of a higher ambition.

William Shakspere left Stratford about 1585 or 1586, an adventurer probably, but, as we hold, not the reckless adventurer which it has been the fashion to represent him. We know not whether his wife and children were with him in London. There is no evidence to show that they did not so dwell. If he were absent alone during a portion of the year from his native place, his family probably lived under the roof of his father and mother. His visits to them would not necessarily be of rare occurrence and of short duration. The Blackfriars was a winter theatre, although at a subsequent period, when the Globe was erected, it was let for summer performances to the "children of the Chapel." With rare exceptions the performances at Court occupied only the period from Hallowmas Day to Shrove Tuesday. The latter part of the summer and autumn seem, therefore, to have been at Shakspere's disposal, at least during the first seven or eight years of his career. That he spent a considerable portion of the year in the quiet of his native walks we may be tolerably well assured, from the constant presence of rural images in all his works, his latest as well as his earliest. We have subsequently more distinct evidence in his farming occupations. At the time of which we are now writing we believe that a great public calamity gave him unwonted leisure; and that here commences what may be called the middle period of his dramatic life, which saw the production of his greater histories, and of some of his most delightful comedies.

There is a well-known passage in A Midsummer Night's Dream which goes very far towards a determination of its date. Titania thus reproaches Oberon:

> "These are the forgeries of jealousy:
> And never, since the middle summer's spring,
> Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
> By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,
> Or on the beached margent of the sea,
> To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
> But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.
> Therefore, the winds, piping to us in vain,
> As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
> Contagious fogs; which, falling in the land,
> Have every pelting river made so proud,
> That they have overborne their continents:
> The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
> The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
> Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard:
> The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
> And crows are fatted with the murrain flock;
> The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud
> And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,
> For lack of tread, are undistinguishable."

The summers of 1592, 1593, and 1594 were so unpropitious, that the minute description of Titania, full of the most precise images derived from the observation of a resident in the country, gives us a far more exact idea of these re-

markable seasons than any of the prosaic records of the time. In 1594, Dr. J. King thus preaches at York: "Remember that the spring (that year when the plague broke out) was very unkind, by means of the abundance of rains that fell. Our July hath been like to a February, our June even as an April, so that the air must needs be infected." He then adds, speaking of three successive years of scarcity, "Our years are turned upside down. Our summers are no summers; our harvests are no harvests; our seed-times are no seed-times."* There are passages in Stow's 'Annals,' and in a manuscript by Dr. Simon Forman in the Ashmolean Museum, which show that in the June and July of 1594 there were excessive rains. But Stow adds, of 1594, "notwithstanding in the month of August there followed a fair harvest." This does not agree with

> "The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
> The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
> Hath rotted, ere his youth attain'd a beard."

It is not necessary to fix Shakspere's description of the ungenial season upon 1594 in particular. There was a succession of unpropitious years, when

> "The spring, the summer,
> The childing autumn, angry winter, change
> Their wonted liveries."

"Our summers are no summers; our harvests are no harvests; our seed-times are no seed-times." Churchyard, in his preface to a poem entitled 'Charity,'† says, "A great nobleman told me this last wet summer the weather was too cold for poets." The poetry of Shakspere was as much subjective as objective, to use one of the favourite distinctions which we have derived from the Germans. The most exact description of the coldness of the "wet summer" becomes in his hands the finest poetry, even taken apart from its dramatic propriety; but in association with the quarrels of Oberon and Titania, it becomes something much higher than descriptive poetry. It is an integral part of those wondrous efforts of the imagination which we can call by no other name than that of creation. It is in A Midsummer Night's Dream, as it appears to us, that Shakspere first felt the entire strength of his creative power. That noble poem is something so essentially different from anything which the stage had previously possessed, that we must regard it as a great effort of the highest originality; conceived perhaps with very little reference to its capacity of pleasing a mixed audience; probably composed with the express intention of being presented to "an audience fit though few," who were familiar with the allusions of classical story, of "masque and antique pageantry," but who had never yet been enabled to form an adequate notion of

> "Such sights as youthful poets dream
> On summer eves by haunted stream."

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* See our Illustrations of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act II., Sc. II.

† Quoted by Mr. Halliwell, in his 'Introduction to A Midsummer Night's Dream.'

The exquisite delicacy of the compliment to "the imperial votaress" fully warrants the belief that in the season of calamity, when her own servants "may not disport her Highness with their wonted and ordinary pastimes," one of them was employed in a labour for her service, which would make all other pastimes of that epoch appear flat and trivial.

It is easy to believe that if any external impulse were wanting to stimulate the poetical ambition of Shakspere—to make him aspire to some higher character than that of the most popular of dramatists—such might be found in 1593 in the clear field which was left for the exercise of his peculiar powers. Robert Greene had died on the 3rd of September, 1592, leaving behind him a sneer at the actor who aspired "to bombast out a blank verse." Had his genius not been destroyed by the wear and tear, and the corrupting influences, of a profligate life, he never could have competed with the mature Shakspere. But as we know that "the only Shake-scene in a country," at whom the unhappy man presumed to scoff, felt the insult somewhat deeply, so we may presume he took the most effectual means to prove to the world that he was not, according to the malignant insinuation of his envious compeer, "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers." We believe that in the gentleness of his nature, when he introduced into A Midsummer Night's Dream

> "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death
> Of learning late deceas'd in beggary."

he dropped a tear upon the grave of him whose demerits were to be forgiven in his misery. On the 1st of June, 1593, Christopher Marlowe perished in a wretched brawl, "slain by Francis Archer," as the Register of Burials of the parish of St. Nicholas, Deptford, informs us. Who was left of the dramatists that could enter into competition with William Shakspere, such as he then was? He was almost alone. The great disciples of his school had not arisen. Jonson had not appeared to found a school of a different character. It was for him, thenceforth, to sway the popular mind after his own fashion; to disregard the obligation which the rivalry of high talent might have imposed upon him of listening to other suggestions than those of his own lofty art; to make the multitude bow before that art, rather than that it should accommodate itself to their habits and prejudices. But at a period when the exercise of the poetical power in connection with the stage was scarcely held amongst the learned and the polite in itself to be poetry, Shakspere vindicated his reputation by the publication of the Venus and Adonis. It was, he says, "the first heir of my invention." There may be a doubt whether Shakspere meant to say literally that this was the first poetical work that he had produced; or whether he held, in deference to some critical opinions, that his dramatic productions could not be classed amongst the heirs of "invention." We think that he meant to use the words literally; and that he used them at a period when he might assume, without vanity, that he had taken his rank amongst the poets of his time. He dedicates to the Earl of Southampton something that had not before been given to the world. He calls his verses "unpolished lines;" he vows to take advan-

tage of all idle hours till he had honoured the young patron of the Muses with "some graver labour." But *invention* was received then, as it was afterwards, as the highest quality of the poet. Dryden says,—"A poet is a maker, as the word signifies; and he who cannot make, that is *invent*, hath his name for nothing." We consider, therefore, that "my invention" is not the language of one unknown to fame. He was exhibiting the powers which he possessed upon a different instrument than that to which the world was accustomed; but the world knew that the power existed. We employ the word *genius* always with reference to the inventive or creative faculty. Substitute the word genius for invention, and the expression used by Shakspere sounds like arrogance. But the substitution may indicate that the actual expression could not have been used by one who came forward for the first time to claim the honours of the poet. It has been argued from this expression that Shakspere had produced nothing original before the Venus and Adonis—that up to the period of its publication, in 1593, he was only a repairer of the works of other men. We hold that the expression implies the direct contrary.

The dreary summer of 1593 has passed away;

> "And on old Hyems' chin, and icy crown,
> An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
> Is, as in mockery, set."

From the 1st of August in that year to the following Christmas the Queen was at Windsor. The plague still raged in London, and the historian gravely records, amongst the evils of the time, that Bartholomew Fair was not held. Essex was at Windsor during this time, and probably the young Southampton, was there also. It was a long period for the Court to remain in one place. Elizabeth was afraid of the plague in the metropolis; and upon a page dying within the castle on the 21st of November, she was about to rush away from the pure air which blew around the "proud keep." But "the lords and ladies who were accommodated so well to their likings had persuaded the Queen to suspend her removal from thence till she should see some other effect."* Living in the dread of "infection," we may believe that the Queen would require amusement; and that the Lord Chamberlain's players, who had so long forborne to resort to the metropolis, might be gathered around her without any danger from their presence. If so, was the Midsummer Night's Dream one of the novelties which her players had to produce? But there was another novelty which tradition tells us was written at the especial desire of the Queen herself—a comedy which John Dennis altered in 1702, and then published with the following statement:—"That this comedy was not despicable, I guessed for several reasons: first, I knew very well that it had pleased one of the greatest queens that ever was in the world—great not only for her wisdom in the arts of government, but for her knowledge of polite learning, and her nice taste of the drama; for such a taste we may be sure she had, by the relish which she had of the ancients. This comedy was written at her command, and by her direction,

* Letter from Mr. Standen to Mr. Bacon, in Birch's 'Memoirs of Queen Elizabeth.'

and she was so eager to see it acted, that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days; and was afterwards, as tradition tells us, very well pleased at the representation." The plain statement of Dennis, "this comedy was written at her command," was amplified by Rowe into the circumstantial relation that Elizabeth was so well pleased with the character of Falstaff in Henry IV. "that she commanded him to continue it for one play more, and to show him in love. Hence all the attempts, which have only resulted in confusion worse confounded, to connect The Merry Wives of Windsor with Henry IV. We have stated this question fully, and, we hope, impartially, in the Introductory Notice to The Merry Wives of Windsor. Let us give one corroboration of the belief there expressed, that the comedy was written in 1593, or very near to that time; the circumstance itself being somewhat of a proof that Shakspere was at Windsor precisely at that period, and ready to obey the Queen's command that a comedy suggested by herself should "be finished in fourteen days."

"Ben Jonson and he [Shakspere] did gather humours of men daily wherever they came." So writes honest Aubrey. "The humour of the constable," which Shakspere, according to the same authority, "happened to take at Grendon in Bucks, which is on the road from London to Stratford," may find a paralle. in mine host of the Garter of The Merry Wives of Windsor. We have little doubt that the character was a portrait of a man well known to the courtiers, and whose good-natured bustling importance was drawn out by the poet as he passed many a cheerful evening of the winter of 1593 around his sea-coal fire. We have shown that in all likelihood the "perplexity" of the host when he lost his horses was a real event. Let us quote the cause of this perplexity from the original sketch of The Merry Wives, as published in 1602. The unfortunate host, who when he is told "Here be three gentlemen come from the Duke, the stranger, sir, would have your horse," exclaims with wondrous glee "They shall have my horses, Bardolph, they must come off, I'll sauce them," is now "cozened." Sir Hugh, who has a spite against mine host, thus tells him the ill news: "Where is mine Host of the Garter? Now, my Host, I would desire you, look you now, to have a care of your entertainments, for there is three sorts of cosen garmombles is cosen all the Host of Maidenhead and Readings." Dr. Caius has previously told him "Dere be a Garman Duke come to de Court has cosened all de host of Branford and Reading." We have pointed out that in 1592 a German Duke did visit Windsor; and that he had a kind of passport from Lord Howard addressed to all justices of peace, mayors, and bailiffs, expressing that it was her Majesty's pleasure "to see him furnished with post-horses in his travel to the sea-side, and there to seek up such shipping, he paying nothing for the same." We asked, was there any dispute about the ultimate payment for the Duke's horses for which *he* was to pay nothing? We have no doubt whatever that the author of The Merry Wives of Windsor literally rendered the tale of mine host's perplexity for the amusement of the Court. For who was the German Duke who visited Windsor in the autumn of 1592? "His Serene Highness the Right Honourable Prince and Lord Frederick Duke of Würtemburg and Teck, Count of Mümpelgart." The pass-

port of Lord Howard describes him as Count Mombeliard. And who are those who have rid away with the horses? "Three sorts of cosen garmombles." One device of the poets of that day for masking a real name under a fictitious was to invert the order of the syllables; thus, in the 'Shepherd's Calendar' Algrind stands for Archbishop Grindal, and Morel for Elmor, Bishop of London. In Lodge's 'Fig for Momus,' we also find Donroy for Matthew Roydon, and Ringde for Dering. Precisely according to this method *Gar*momble is Momble*gar*—Mumpelgart.* We think this is decisive as to the allusion; and that the allusion is decisive as to the date of the play. What would be a good joke when the Court was at Windsor in 1593, with the visit of the Duke fresh in the memory of the courtiers, would lose its point at a later period. Let us fix then the performance of The Merry Wives of Windsor at that period when Elizabeth remained five months in her castle, repressing her usual desire to progress from

* We are indebted for this suggestion to a correspondent to whom we offer our best thanks.

county to county, or to move from palace to palace. She has completed her noble terrace, with its almost unrivalled prospect of beauty and fertility. Her gallery too is finished, whose large bay window looks out upon the same magnificent landscape. The comedy, which probably arose out of some local incident, abundantly provocative of courtly gossip and merriment, has hastily been produced. The hand of the master is yet visible in it. Its allusions, contrary to the wont of the author, are all local, and therefore agreeable to his audience. As his characters hover about Frogmore, with its farm-house where Anne Page is a-feasting; as Falstaff meets his most perilous adventure in Datchet Mead; as Mistress Anne and her fairies crouch in the castle ditch,—the poet shows that he has made himself familiar with the scenes where the Queen delighted to dwell. The characters, too, are of the very time of the representation of the play, perhaps more than one of them copied from actual persons. In the original sketch Shakspere hardly makes an attempt to transfer the scene to an earlier period. The persons of the drama are all of them drawn from the rich storehouse of the humours of the middle classes of his own day. We may readily believe the tradition which tells us that the Queen was "very well pleased at the representation." The compliment to her in association with Windsor, in the last scene, where the drollery is surrounded with the most appropriate poetry, sufficiently indicates the place at which the comedy was performed, and the audience to whom it was presented:—

"About, about;
Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out:
Strew good luck, ouphes, on every sacred room,
That it may stand till the perpetual doom,
In state as wholesome as in state 't is fit;
Worthy the owner, and the owner it."

This is one of the few passages which in the amended edition remain unaltered from the original text.

NOTE ON SHAKSPERE'S OCCUPATIONS IN 1593.

It may be assumed with tolerable certainty that for nearly a year Shakspere was unemployed in his profession. We have endeavoured to show in this chapter how he filled up some part of his leisure. But with reference to his poetical labours it is scarcely necessary to infer that all his time was spent in "lonely musing." A notion has been propounded that he personally visited Italy. In the Local Illustrations to the Taming of the Shrew, and the Merchant of Venice, with which we were favoured by Miss Martineau, will be found some very striking proofs of Shakspere's intimate acquaintance, not only with Italian manners, but with those minor particulars of the domestic life of Italy, such as the furniture and ornaments of houses, which could scarcely be derived from books, nor, with reference to their minute accuracy, from the conversation of those who had "swam in a gondola." These observations were communicated to us by our excellent friend, without any previous theorizing on the subject, or any acquaintance with the opinions that had been just then advanced on this matter by Mr. Brown. It is not our intention here to go over this ground again; but it appears to us strongly confirmatory of the belief that Shakspere did visit Italy, that in 1593 he might have been absent several months from England without any interference with his professional pursuits. It is difficult to name any earlier period of his life in which we can imagine him with the leisure and the command of means necessary for such a journey. The subsequent part of the sixteenth century certainly left him no leisure. The Merchant of Venice and Othello (in which there is also one or two remarkable indications of local knowledge) were produced within a few years of 1593. The Taming of the Shrew probably belongs to the exact period.

The Globe Theatre.

CHAPTER V.

THE GLOBE.

We have a distinct record when the theatres were re-opened after the plague. The 'Diary' of Philip Henslowe records that "the Earl of Sussex his men" acted 'Huon of Bordeaux' on the 28th of December, 1593. Henslowe appears to have had an interest in this company. It is probable that Shakspere's theatre of the Blackfriars was opened about the same period. We have some evidence to show what was the duration of the winter season at this theatre; for the same diary shows that from June, 1594, the performances of the theatre

at Newington Butts were a joint undertaking by the Lord Admiral's men and the Lord Chamberlain's men. How long this association of two companies lasted is not easy to determine; but during the month of June we have entries of the exhibition of Andronicus, of Hamlet, and of The Taming of a Shrew No subsequent entries exhibit the names of plays which have any real or apparent connection with Shakspere.* It appears that in December, 1593, Richard Burbage entered into a bond with Peter Streete, a carpenter, for the performance on the part of Burbage of the covenants contained in an indenture of agreement by which Streete undertook to erect a new theatre for Burbage's company. This was the famous Globe on the Bankside, of which Shakspere was unquestionably a proprietor. We thus see that in 1594 there were new demands to be made upon his invention; and we may reasonably conclude that the reliance of Burbage and his other fellows upon their poet's unequalled powers was one of their principal inducements to engage in this new enterprise.

In the midst of his professional engagements, which doubtless were renewed with increased activity after their long suspension, Shakspere published his Rape of Lucrece. He had vowed to take advantage of all idle hours till he had honoured Lord Southampton with some graver labour than the first heir of his invention. The Venus and Adonis was entered in the Registers of the Stationers' Company on the 18th of April, 1593. The Lucrece appears in the same Registers on the 9th of May, 1594. That this elaborate poem was wholly or in part composed in that interval of leisure which resulted from the shutting of the theatres in 1593 may be reasonably conjectured; but it is evident that during the year which had elapsed between the publication of the first and the second poem, Shakspere had been brought into more intimate companionship with his noble patron. The language of the first dedication is that of distant respect, the second is that of grateful friendship:—

"*To the Right Honourable Henry Wriothesly, Earl of Southampton and Baron of Titchfield.*

"The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet, without beginning, is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship, to whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happiness. Your Lordship's in all duty,

"WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE."

Henry Wriothesly was born October 6th, 1573. His grandfather, the first Earl, was the celebrated Chancellor of Henry VIII., a fortunate statesman and lawyer, whose memory, however he was lauded by his contemporaries, is infamously associated with the barbarous cruelties of that age in the torture of the heroic Ann Askew. His son Henry, the second Earl, bred up by his father in the doctrines opposed to the Reformation, adhered with pertinacity to the old forms of religion, and was of course shut out from the honours and employ-

* See our Introductory Notice to Hamlet.

ments of the government. He was unmolested, however, till his partisanship in the cause of Mary Queen of Scots occasioned his imprisonment in the Tower, in 1572. The house in which his father the Chancellor dwelt was also his London residence; and its site is still indicated by the name of Southampton Buildings. In Aggas's map the mansion appears to have been backed by extensive gardens. Gervase Markham, in his curious book, printed in 1624, entitled 'Honour in his Perfection; or, a Treatise in Commendation of the Vertues and Renowned Vertuous Vndertakings of the Illustrious and Heroicall Princes Henry Earle of Oxenford, Henry Earle of Southampton, Robert Earle of Essex, &c.,' thus describes the state with which the father of Shakspere's friend was surrounded:—"His muster-roll never consisted of four lackeys and a coachman, but of a whole troop of at least a hundred well-mounted gentlemen and yeomen; he was not known in the streets by guarded liveries, but by gold chains; not by painted butterflies, ever running as if some monster pursued them, but by tall goodly fellows, that kept a constant pace, both to guard his person and to admit any man to their lord which had serious business." The pomp with which he was encircled might in some degree have compensated for the absence of courtly splendour. But he lived not long to enjoy his solitary dignity, or, as was sufficiently probable, to conform to the opinions which might have opened to him the road to the honours of the crown. He died in 1581, leaving two children, Henry and Mary. The boy earl was only eight years old at the death of his father. During his long minority the accumulation of the family property must have been great: and we may thus believe that the general munificence of his patronage in after-life has not been overrated. He appears to have had careful guardians, who taught him that there were higher honours to be won than those which his rank and wealth gave him. At the age of twelve he became a student of St. John's College, Cambridge; and four years afterwards took the degree of Master of Arts by the usual exercises.* He subsequently became, according to one account, a member of Gray's Inn. At the period when Shakspere dedicated to him his Venus and Adonis, he was scarcely twenty years of age. He is supposed to have become intimate with Shakspere from the circumstance that his mother had married Sir Thomas Heneage, who filled the office of Treasurer of the Chamber, and in the discharge of his official duties would be brought into frequent intercourse with the Lord Chamberlain's players. This is Drake's theory. The more natural belief appears to be that he had a strong attachment to literature, and, with the generous impetuosity of his character, did not regard the distinctions of rank to the extent with which they were regarded by men of colder temperaments and more worldly minds. Shakspere appears to have been the first amongst the writers of his day that offered a public tribute to the merits of the young nobleman. Both the dedications, and especially that of Lucrece, are conceived in a modest and a manly spirit, entirely different from the ordinary language of literary adulation. Nash, who dedicates a little book to him

* "Cum prius disputasset publicè pro gradu."—*Harleian MS.* 7038.

at the same period, after calling him "a dear lover and cherisher, as well of the lovers of poets as of poets themselves," gives us one of the many proofs that the characters of satirist and flatterer may have some affinity:—"Incomprehensible is the height of your spirit, both in heroic resolution and matters of conceit. Unreprievably perisheth that book whatsoever to waste paper which on the diamond rock of your judgment disasterly chanceth to be shipwracked." Gervase Markham, who many years after became the elaborate panegyrist of Southampton, dedicates a tragedy to him in the following sonnet, in 1595:—

"Thou glorious laurel of the Muses' hill,
Whose eyes doth crown the most victorious pen;
Bright lamp of virtue, in whose sacred skill
Lives all the bliss of ears-enchanting men:
From graver subjects of thy grave assays,
Bend thy courageous thoughts unto these lines;
The grave from whence mine humble Muse doth raise
True honour's spirit in her rough designs:
And when the stubborn stroke of my harsh song
Shall seasonless glide through almighty ears,
Vouchsafe to sweet it with thy blessed tongue,
Whose well-tun'd sound stills music in the spheres:
So shall my tragic lays be blest by thee,
And from thy lips suck their eternity."

This hyperbolical praise is something different from Shakspere's simple expressions of respect and devotion in the dedication to the Lucrece. There is evidence in that dedication of a higher sort of intercourse between the two minds than consists with any forced adulation of any kind, and especially with any extravagant compliments to the learning and to the abilities of a superior in rank. Such testimonies are always suspicious; and probably honest old Florio, when he dedicated his 'World of Words' to the Earl in 1598, shows pretty correctly what the race of panegyrists expected in return for their compliments: "In truth, I acknowledge an entire debt, not only of my best knowledge, but of all; yea of more than I know, or can to your bounteous lordship, in whose pay and patronage I have lived some years; to whom I owe and vow the years I have to live. But, as to me, and many more, the glorious and gracious sunshine of your honour hath infused light and life." There is an extraordinary anecdote told by Rowe of Lord Southampton's munificence to Shakspere, which seems to bring the poet somewhat near to Florio's plain-speaking association of pay and patronage:—"What grace soever the Queen conferred upon him, it was not to her only he owed the fortune which the reputation of his wit made. He had the honour to meet with many great and uncommon marks of favour and friendship from the Earl of Southampton, famous in the histories of that time for his friendship to the unfortunate Earl of Essex. It was to that noble lord that he dedicated his poem of Venus and Adonis. There is one instance so singular in the magnificence of this patron of Shakspeare's, that if I had not been assured that the story was handed down by Sir William D'Avenant, who

was probably very well acquainted with his affairs, I should not have ventured to have inserted; that my Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds, to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to. A bounty very great, and very rare at any time, and almost equal to that profuse generosity the present age has shown to French dancers and Italian singers."* This is one of the many instances in which we are not warranted in rejecting a tradition, however we may look suspiciously upon the accuracy of its details. D'Avenant could scarcely be very well acquainted with Shakspere's affairs, for he was only ten years old when Shakspere died. The sum mentioned as the gift of the young nobleman to the poet is so large, looking at the value of money in those days, that it could scarcely consist with the independence of a generous spirit to bear the load of such a prodigality of bounty. The notions of those days were, however, different from ours. Examples will readily suggest themselves of the most lavish rewards bestowed by princes and nobles upon great painters. They received such gifts without any compromise of their intellectual dignity. It was the same then with poets. The public, now the best patron, was then but a sorry paymaster; and the great stepped in to give the price for a dedication as they would purchase any other gratification of individual vanity. According to the habits of the time, Shakspere might have received a large gift from Lord Southampton, without any forfeiture of his self-respect. Nevertheless, Rowe's story must still appear sufficiently apocryphal: "My Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds, to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to." It is not necessary to account for the gradual acquisition of property by Shakspere that we should yield our assent to this tradition, without some qualification. In 1589, when Lord Southampton was a lad at College, Shakspere had already acquired that property which was to be the foundation of his future fortune. He was then a shareholder in the Blackfriars Theatre. That the adventure was a prosperous one, not only to himself but to his brother shareholders, may be inferred from the fact that four years afterwards they began the building of another theatre. The Globe was commenced in December, 1593; and being constructed for the most part of wood, was ready to be opened, we should imagine, in the summer of 1594. In 1596 the same prosperous company were prepared to expend considerable sums upon the repair and extension of their original theatre, the Blackfriars. The name of Shakspere occupies a prominent position in the document from which we collect this fact: it is a petition to the Lords of the Privy Council from "Thomas Pope, Richard Burbadge, John Hemings, Augustine Philips, William Shakespeare William Kempe, William Slye, Nicholas Tooley, and others, servants to the Right Honorable the Lord Chamberlain to her Majesty;" and it sets forth that they are "the owners and players of the private theatre in the Blackfriars: that it hath fallen into decay; and that it has been found necessary to make the same more convenient for the entertainment of auditories coming thereto."

* Rowe's 'Life of Shakspeare.'

It then states what is important to the present question:—"To this end your petitioners have all and each of them put down sums of money according to their shares in the said theatre, and which they have justly and honestly gained by the exercise of their quality of stage-players." It then alleges that certain inhabitants of the precinct had besought the Council not to allow the said private house to remain open, "but hereafter to be shut up and closed, to the manifest and great injury of your petitioners, who have no other means whereby to maintain their wives and families, but by the exercise of their quality as they have heretofore done." The common proprietorship of the company in the Globe and Blackfriars is also noticed:—"In the summer season your petitioners are able to play at their new-built house on the Bankside, called the Globe, but in the winter they are compelled to come to the Blackfriars." If the winter theatre be shut up, they say they will be "unable to practise themselves in any plays or interludes when called upon to perform for the recreation and solace of her Majesty and her honourable Court, as they have been heretofore accustomed." Though the Registers of the Council and the Office-books of the Treasurer of the Chamber are wanting for this exact period, we have here the distinct evidence of the intimate relation between Shakspere's company and the Court. The petitioners, in concluding by the prayer that their "honourable Lordships will grant permission to finish the reparations and alterations they have begun," add as a reason for this favour that they "have hitherto been well ordered in their behaviour and just in their dealings."* The performances at the Blackfriars went on without interruption. Shakspere, in 1597, bought "all that capital messuage or tenement in Stratford called the New Place." This appears to have been his first investment in property distinct from his theatrical speculations. The purchase of the best house in his native town, at a period of his life when his professional occupations could have allowed him little leisure to reside in it, would appear to have had in view an early retirement from a pursuit which probably was little agreeable to him. His powers as a dramatic writer might be profitably exercised without being associated with the actor's vocation. We know from other circumstances that at this period Stratford was nearest to his heart. On the 24th of January, 1598, Mr. Abraham Sturley, an alderman of Stratford, writes to his brother-in-law, Richard Quiney, then in London:—"I would write nothing unto you now—but come home. I pray God send you comfortably home. This is one special remembrance, from your father's motion. It seemeth by him that our countryman Mr. Shakspere is willing to disburse some money upon some odd yard land or other at Shottery, or near about us. He thinketh it a very fit pattern to move him to deal in the matter of our tithes. By the instructions you can give him thereof, and by the friends he can make therefore, we think it a fair mark for him to shoot at, and not impossible to hit. It obtained, would advance him indeed, and would do us much good." We thus see that in a year after the purchase of New Place, Shakspere's accumulation

* The petition is printed in Mr. Collier's 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. i., p. 298.

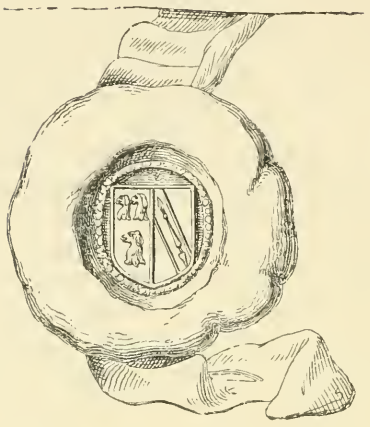
of money was going on. The worthy aldermen and his connections appear to look confidently to their countryman, Mr. Shakspere, to assist them in their needs. On the 4th of November, in the same year, Sturley again writes a very long letter "to his most loving brother, Mr. Richard Quiney, at the Bell, in Carter Lane, in London," in which he says of a letter written by Quiney to him on the 21st of October, that it imported, amongst other matters, "that our countryman Mr. W. Shakspere would procure us money, which I well like of, as I shall hear when, and where, and how; and I pray let not go that occasion, if it may sort to any indifferent conditions." Quiney himself at this very time writes the following characteristic letter to his "loving good friend and countryman, Mr. William Shakspere:"—"Loving countryman, I am bold of you as of a friend, craving your help with thirty pounds upon Mr. Bushell and my security, or Mr. Myttens with me. Mr. Rosswell is not come to London as yet, and I have especial cause. You shall friend me much in helping me out of all the debts I owe in London, I thank God, and much quiet to my mind which would not be indebted. I am now towards the Court in hope your answer for the dispatch of my business. You shall neither lose credit nor money by me, the Lord willing; and now but persuade yourself so as I hope, and you shall not need to fear but with all hearty thankfulness I will hold my time, and content your friend, and if we bargain farther, you shall be the paymaster yourself. My time bids me to hasten to an end, and so I commit this to your care and hope of your help. I fear I shall not be back this night from the Court. Haste. The Lord be with you and with us all. Amen. From the Bell in Carter Lane, the 25th October, 1598. Yours in all kindness, Ryc. Quiney.' The anxious dependence which these honest men appear to have upon the good offices of their townsman is more satisfactory even than the evidence which their letters afford of his worldly condition.

In the midst of this prosperity the registers of the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon present to us an event which must have thrown a shade over the brightest prospects.

August 11 Hamnet filius William Shakspere

This is the register of the burial of the only son of the poet in 1596. Hamnet was born on the 2nd of February, 1585; so that at his death he was eleven years and six months old. He was a twin child; and it is not unlikely that he was constitutionally weak. Some such cause interfered probably with the education of the twin-sister Judith; for whilst Susanna, the elder, is recorded to have been "witty above her sex," and wrote a firm and vigorous hand, as we may judge from her signature to a deed in 1639,

Susanna Hall



the mark of Judith appears as an attesting witness to a conveyance in 1611.

Judith Shaxpeare

Shakspere himself has given us a most exquisite picture of a boy, who, like his own Hamnet, died young, in whom the imaginative faculty was all-predominant. Was this a picture of his own precocious child?

"*Her.* Take the boy to you: he so troubles me,
'T is past enduring.
1 *Lady.* Come, my gracious lord,
Shall I be your playfellow?
Mam. No, I 'll none of you.
1 *Lady.* Why, my sweet lord?
Mam. You 'll kiss me hard; and speak to me as if
I were a baby still.—I love you better.
2 *Lady.* And why so, my lord?
Mam. Not for because
Your brows are blacker; yet black brows, they say,
Become some women best; so that there be not
Too much hair there, but in a semi-circle,
Or a half-moon made with a pen.
2 *Lady.* Who taught you this?
Mam. I learn'd it out of women's faces.—Pray, now,
What colour are your eyebrows?
1 *Lady.* Blue, my lord.

Mam. Nay, that 's a mock : I have seen a lady's nose
That has been blue, but not her eyebrows."

. . . . . .

"*Her.* What wisdom stirs amongst you? Come, sir, now
I am for you again : Pray you, sit by us,
And tell 's a tale.
Mam. Merry, or sad, shall 't be?
Her. As merry as you will.
Mam. A sad tale 's best for winter
I have one of sprites and goblins.
Her. Let 's have that, good sir.
Come on, sit down :—Come on, and do your best
To fright me with your sprites : you 're powerful at it.
Mam. There was a man —
Her. Nay, come, sit down ; then on.
Mam. Dwelt by a churchyard ;—I will tell it softly ;
Yon crickets shall not hear it.
Her. Come on then,
And give 't in mine ear." *

With the exception of this inevitable calamity, the present period may probably be regarded as a happy epoch in Shakspere's life. He had conquered any adverse circumstances by which his earlier career might have been impeded. He had taken his rank among the first minds of his age ; and, above all, his pursuits were so engrossing as to demand a constant exercise of his faculties, but to demand that exercise in the cultivation of the highest and the most pleasurable thoughts. This was the period to which belong the great histories of Richard II., Richard III., and Henry IV., and the delicious comedies of the Merchant of Venice, Much Ado about Nothing, and Twelfth Night. These productions afford the most abundant evidence that the greatest of intellects was in the most healthful possession of its powers. These were not hasty adaptations for the popular appetite, as we may well believe some of the earlier plays were in their first shape ; but highly-wrought performances, to which all the method of his cultivated art had been strenuously applied. It was at this period that the dramatic poet appears not to have been satisfied with the applause of the Globe or the Blackfriars, or even with the gracious encouragements of a refined Court. During three years he gave to the world careful editions of some of these plays, as if to vindicate the drama from the pedantic notion that the Muses of tragedy and comedy did not meet their sisters upon equal ground. Richard II. and Richard III. were published in 1597 ; Love's Labour's Lost, and Henry IV., Part I., in 1598 ; Romeo and Juliet, corrected and augmented, in 1599 ; Henry IV., Part II., the Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Much Ado about Nothing, in 1600. The system of publication then ceased. It no doubt interfered with the interests of his fellows ; and Shakspere was not likely to assert an exclusive interest, or to gratify an exclusive pride, at the expense of his associates. But his reputation was higher than that of any other man, when only four of his plays were accessible to the *readers* of poetry. In 1598 it was proclaimed, not timidly or questionably, that

* Winter's Tale, Act II., Sc. 1.

"as Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for tragedy and comedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare, among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage:" and "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare."* It was certainly not at this period of Shakspere's life that he wrote with reference to himself, unlocking his heart to some nameless friend .—

"When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee,—and then my state
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

Sonnets of Shakspere were in existence in 1598, when Meres tells us of "his sugared sonnets among his private friends." We have entered so fully into the question, whether these poems are to be considered autobiographical, that it would be useless for us here to repeat an argument not hastily entered upon, or carelessly set forth. We believe that the order in which they were printed is an arbitrary one; that some form a continu us poem or poems, that others are isolated in their subjects and the persons to whom they are addressed; that some may express the poet's personal feelings, that others are wholly fictitious, dealing with imaginary loves and jealousies, and not attempting to separate the personal identity of the artist from the sentiments which he expressed, and the situations which he delineated. "We believe that, taken as works of art, having a certain degree of continuity, the Sonnets of Spenser, of Daniel, of Drayton, of Shakspere, although in many instances they might shadow forth real feelings and be outpourings of the inmost heart, were presented to the world as exercises of fancy, and were received by the world as such."† Even of those portions of these remarkable relics which appear to have an obvious reference to the poet's feelings and circumstances, we cannot avoid rejecting the principle of continuity; for they clearly belong to different periods of his life, if they are the reflection of his real sentiments. We have the playfulness of an early love, and the agonizing throes of an unlawful passion. They speak of a period when the writer had won no honour or substantial rewards—"in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," the period of his youth, if the allusion was at all real; and yet the writer is

"With time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn."

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* Francis Meres.

† Illustrations of the Sonnets, Pictorial Edition, p. 114.

One little dedicatory poem says,

> "Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
> Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
> To thee I send this written embassage,
> To witness duty, not to show my wit."

Another (and it is distinctly associated with what we hold to be a continued little poem, wholly fictitious, in which the poet dramatizes as it were the poetical character) boasts that

> "Not marble, not the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

Without attempting therefore to disprove that these Sonnets were addressed to the Earl of Southampton, or to the Earl of Pembroke, we must leave the reader who fancies he can find in them a shadowy outline of Shakspere's life to form his own conclusion from their careful perusal. We have endeavoured, in our analysis of these poems, to place before him all the facts which have relation to the subject. But to preserve in this place the unity of our narrative with reference to the period before us, we venture to reprint a passage from the Illustrations to which we refer: "The 71st to the 74th Sonnets seem bursting from a heart oppressed with a sense of its own unworthiness, and surrendered to some overwhelming misery. There is a line in the 74th which points at suicide. We cling to the belief that the sentiments here expressed are essentially dramatic. In the 32nd Sonnet, where we recognise the man Shakspere speaking in his own modest and cheerful spirit, death is to come across his '*well contented* day.' The opinion which we have endeavoured to sustain of the probable admixture of the artificial and the real in the Sonnets, arising from their supposed original fragmentary state, necessarily leads to the belief that some are accurate illustrations of the poet's situation and feelings. It is collected from these Sonnets, for example, that his profession as a player was disagreeable to him; and this complaint is found amongst those portions which we have separated from the series of verses which appear to us to be written in an artificial character. It might be addressed to any one of his family, or some honoured friend, such as Lord Southampton:—

> 'O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide
> Than public means, which public manners breeds.
> Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
> And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.'

But if from his professional occupation his nature was felt by him to be subdued to what it worked in,—if thence his name received a brand,—if vulgar scandal sometimes assailed him,—he had high thoughts to console him, such as were never before imparted to mortal. This was probably written in some period of dejection, when his heart was ill at ease, and he looked upon the world with a

slight tinge of indifference, if not of dislike. Every man of high genius has felt something of this. It was reserved for the highest to throw it off, 'like dew-drops from the lion's mane.' But the profound self-abasement and despondency of the 74th Sonnet, exquisite as the diction is, appear to us unreal, as a representation of the mental state of William Shakspere; written, as it most probably was, at a period of his life when he revels and luxuriates (in the comedies which belong to the close of the sixteenth century) in the spirit of enjoyment, rushing from a heart full of love for his species, at peace with itself and with all the world."

[Richard Burbage.]

[The Falcon Tavern.]

CHAPTER VI.

WIT-COMBATS.

"MANY were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson; which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war: Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow, in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention." Such is Thomas Fuller's well-known description of the convivial intercourse of Shakspere and Jonson, first published in 1662. A biographer of Shakspere says, "The memory of Fuller perhaps teemed with their sallies." That memory, then, must have been furnished at secondhand; for Fuller was not born till 1608. He beheld them in his mind's eye only. Imperfect, and in many respects worthless, as the few traditions of these wit-combats are, there can be no doubt of the companionship and ardent friendship of these two monarchs of the stage. Ful-

ler's fanciful comparison of their respective conversational powers is probably to some extent a just one. The difference in the constitution of their minds, and the diversity of their respective acquirements, would more endear each to the other's society.

Rowe thus describes the commencement of the intercourse between Shakspere and Jonson:—"His acquaintance with Ben Jonson began with a remarkable piece of humanity and good nature. Mr. Jonson, who was at that time altogether unknown to the world, had offered one of his plays to the players, in order to have it acted; and the persons into whose hands it was put, after having turned it carelessly and superciliously over, were just upon returning it to him with an ill-natured answer, that it would be of no service to their company, when Shakspeare luckily cast his eye upon it, and found something so well in it as to engage him first to read it through, and afterwards to recommend Mr. Jonson and his writings to the public."* The tradition which Rowe thus records is not supported by minute facts which have since become known. In Henslowe's Diary of plays performed at his theatre, we have an entry under the date of the 11th of May, 1597, of 'The Comedy of Humours.' This was no doubt a new play, for it was acted eleven times; and there can be little question that it was Jonson's comedy of 'Every Man in his Humour.' A few months after we have the following entry in the same document:—"Lent unto Benjamin Jonson, player, the 22nd of July, 1597, in ready money, the sum of four pounds, to be paid it again whensoever either I or my son shall demand it." Again: "Lent unto Benjamin Jonson, the 3rd of December, 1597, upon a book which he was to write for us before Christmas next after the date hereof, which he showed the plot unto the company: I say, lent in ready money unto him the sum of twenty shillings." On the 5th of January, 1598, Henslowe records in the same way the trifling loan of five shillings. An advance is also made by Henslowe to his company on the 13th of August, 1598, "to buy a book called 'Hot Anger soon cold,' of Mr. Porter, Mr. Chettle, and Benjamin Jonson, in full payment, the sum of six pounds." We thus see, that in 1597 and 1598 there was an intimate connection of Jonson with the stage, but not with Shakspere's company. It can scarcely be supposed that Jonson was a writer for the stage earlier than 1597, and that the "remarkable piece of humanity and good nature" recorded of Shakspere took place before the connection of Jonson with Henslowe's theatre. He was born, according to Gifford, in 1574. In January, 1619, he sent a poetical "picture of himself" to Drummond, in which these lines occur:—

"My hundred of grey hairs
Told six and forty years."

This would place his birth in 1573.† Drummond, in narrating Jonson's account of "his own life, education, birth, actions," up to the period in which we have shown how dependent he was upon the advances of a theatrical manager,

* 'Life of Shakspeare.'

† See 'Jonson's Conversations with Drummond,' published by the Shakespeare Society.

thus writes: — "His grandfather came from Carlisle, and, he thought, from Annandale to it: he served King Henry VIII., and was a gentleman. His father lost all his estate under Queen Mary, having been cast in prison and forfeited; at last turned minister: so he was a minister's son. He himself was posthumous born, a month after his father's decease; brought up poorly, put to school by a friend (his master Camden); after, taken from it, and put to another craft (I think was to be a wright or bricklayer), which he could not endure; then went he to the Low Countries; but returning soon, he betook himself to his wonted studies. In his service in the Low Countries, he had, in the face of both the camps, killed an enemy and taken *opima spolia* from him; and since his coming to England, being appealed to the fields, he had killed his adversary which had hurt him in the arm, and whose sword was ten inches longer than his; for the which he was imprisoned, and almost at the gallows. Then took he his religion by trust, of a priest who visited him in prison. Thereafter he was twelve years a Papist." Aubrey says in his random way, "He killed Mr. Marlowe the poet on Bunhill, coming from the Green Curtain Playhouse." We know where Marlowe was killed, and when he was killed. He was slain at Deptford in 1593. Gifford supposes that this tragical event in Jonson's life took place in 1595; but the conjecture is set aside by an indisputable account of the fact. Philip Henslowe, writing to his son-in-law Alleyn on the 26th of September, 1598, says, "Since you were with me I have lost one of my company, which hurteth me greatly, that is Gabrell [Gabriel], for he is slain in Hogsden Fields by the hands of Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer; therefore I would fain have a little of your counsel, if I could."* This event took place then, we see, exactly at the period when Jonson was in constant intercourse with Henslowe's company; and it probably arose out of some quarrel at the theatre that he was "appealed to the fields." The expression of Henslowe, "Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer," is a remarkable one. It is inconsistent with Jonson's own declaration, that after his return from the Low Countries he "betook himself to his wonted studies." We believe that Henslowe, under the excitement of that loss for which he required the counsel of Alleyn, used it as a term of opprobrium, that was familiar to his company. Dekker, who was a writer for Henslowe's theatre, and who in 1599 was associated with Jonson in the composition of two plays, ridicules his former friend and colleague, in 1602, as a "poor lime and hair rascal,"—as one who ambled "in a leather pilch by a play-waggon in the highway"—"a foul-fisted mortar-treader"—"one famous for killing a player"—one whose face "looks for all the world like a rotten russet-apple when it is bruised"—whose "goodly and glorious nose was blunt, blunt, blunt"—who is asked, "how chance it passeth that you bid good bye to an honest trade of building chimnies and laying down bricks for a worse handicraftness?"—who is twitted with "dost stamp, mad Tamburlaine, dost stamp; thou think'st thou'st mortar under thy feet, dost?"—one whose face was 'punched full of eyelet-holes like the cover of a warming-pan"—"a hollow-cheeked scrag." It is evident from all this abuse, which we transcribe as the

* Letter in Dulwich College, quoted in Collier's 'Memoirs of Alleyn.'

passages occur in Dekker's 'Satiro-Mastix, that the poverty, the personal appearance, and, above all, the original occupation of Jonson, exposed him to the vulgar ridicule of some of those with whom he was brought into contact at the theatre. They did not feel as honest old Fuller felt, when, describing Jonson, being in want of maintenance, as "fain to return to the trade of his father-in-law," the old chronicler of the Worthies says — "Let not them blush that have, but those who have not, a lawful calling." We can thus understand what Henslowe means when he says "Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer." In the autumn of 1598 the bricklayer-poet was lying in prison. At the Christmas of that year 'Every Man in his Humour,' greatly altered from the original sketch produced by Henslowe's company, was brought out by the Lord Chamberlain's company at the Blackfriars. The doors of Henslowe's theatre on the Bankside were probably shut against the man who had killed Gabriel, "whose sword was ten inches longer than his." There seems to have been an effort on the part of some one to console the unhappy prisoner under his calamity. He was a writer for a rival theatre, receiving its advances up to the 13th of August, 1598. His improved play was brought out by the company of a theatre which stood much higher in the popular and the critical estimation a few months afterwards. There was an act of friendship somewhere. May we not believe that this proud man, who seems to have been keenly alive to neglect and injury — who says that "Daniel was at jealousies with him,"—that "Drayton feared him"—that "he beat Marston, and took his pistol from him" — that "Sir William Alexander was not half kind unto him"—that "Markham was but a base fellow"—that "such were Day and Middleton,"—that "Sharpham, Day, Dekker, were all rogues, and that Minshew was one,"—that "Abraham Francis was a fool"*—may we not believe that some deep remembrance of unusual kindness induced him to write of Shakspere, "I loved the *man*, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature?" We have no hesitation in abiding by the common sense of Gifford, who treated with ineffable scorn all that has been written about Jonson's envy, and malignity, and coldness towards Shakspere. We believe with him "that no feud, no jealousy ever disturbed their connection; that Shakspere was pleased with Jonson, and that Jonson loved and admired Shakspere." They worked upon essentially different principles of art; they had each their admirers and disciples; but the field in which they laboured was large enough for both of them, and they each cultivated it after his own fashion. With the exception of such occasional quarrels as those between Jonson and Dekker, the poets of that time lived as a generous brotherhood, whose cordial intercourse might soften many of the rigours of their worldly lot. Jonson was by nature proud, perhaps arrogant. His struggles with penury had made him proud. He had the inestimable possession of a well-educated boyhood; he had the consciousness of great abilities and great acquirements. He was thrown amongst a band of clever men, some of whom perhaps laughed, as Dekker unworthily did, at his honest efforts to set himself above the real disgrace of earn-

* All these passages are extracted from his conversations with Drummond.

[Jonson.]

ing his bread by corrupt arts; who ridiculed his pimpled face, his "one eye lower than t'other," and his "coat like a coachman's coat, with slips under the arm-pits." So Aubrey describes him who laid down laws of criticism, and married music and painting to the most graceful verse. But when the bricklayer had the gratification of seeing his first comedy performed by the Lord Chamberlain's company, to

"Sport with human follies, not with crimes,"

there was one amongst that company strong enough to receive with kindliness even the original prologue, in which the romantic drama, perhaps some of his own plays, were declaimed against by one who belonged to another school of art. Shakspere could not doubt that a man of vigorous understanding had arisen up to devote himself to the exhibition of "popular errors,"—humours—passing accidents of life and character. He himself worked upon more enduring materials; but he would nevertheless see that there was one fitted to deal with the comedy of manners in a higher spirit than had yet been displayed. Not only was the amended 'Every Man in his Humour' acted by Shakspere's

company, Shakspere himself taking one of the characters; but the second comedy from the same satirist was first produced by that company in 1599. When the author, in his Induction, exclaims

> "If any here chance to behold himself,
> Let him not dare to challenge me of wrong;
> For, if he shame to have his follies known,
> First he should shame to act 'em: my strict hand
> Was made to seize on vice, and with a gripe
> Squeeze out the humour of such spongy souls
> As lick up every idle vanity,"—

the poet who "was not for an age, but for all time,"—he, especially, who never once comes before the audience in his individual character,—might gently smile at these high pretensions. But he would stretch out the hand of cordial friendship to the man; for he was in earnest—his indignation against vice was an honest one. Though a little personal vanity might peep out—though the satirist might "venture on the stage when the play is ended to exchange courtesies and compliments with gallants in the lord's rooms, to make all the house rise up in arms and to cry,—That's Horace, that's he, that's he, that's he, that pens and purges humours and diseases," * Shakspere's congratulations on the success of Asper—for so Jonson delighted to call himself—would come from the heart. An evening at the Falcon might fitly conclude such a first play.

The things "done at the Mermaid" were not as yet. Francis Beaumont, who has made them immortal by his description, was at this period scarcely sixteen years of age. His 'Letter to Jonson' may, however, give us the best notion of the earlier convivial intercourse of some of the illustrious band to whom the young dramatist refers:—

> "Methinks the little wit I had is lost
> Since I saw you; for wit is like a rest
> Held up at tennis, which men do the best
> With the best gamesters: what things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble, and so full of subtile flame,
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolv'd to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life; then when there hath been thrown
> Wit able enough to justify the town
> For three days past—wit that might warrant be
> For the whole city to talk foolishly
> Till that were cancell'd: and when that was gone,
> We left an air behind us, which alone
> Was able to make the two next companies
> Right witty: though but downright fools, mere wise."

The play at the Blackfriars would be over at five o'clock. The gallants who came from the ordinary to the playhouse would have dined; and so would the players. At three the play commenced; and an audience more rational than

* Satiro-Mastix.

those of our own times as to the quantity of amusement which they demanded would be quite satisfied with the two hours' exhibition :—

> "Those that come to see
> Only a show or two, and so agree
> The play may pass, if they be still and willing,
> I 'll undertake may see away their shilling
> Richly in two short hours." *

Out of the smoke and glare of the torches (for in the private theatres the windows were closed so as to exclude the day) would the successful author and his friends come forth into the grey light of a January evening.† The Blackfriars Stairs are close at hand. John Taylor the water-poet was then a very young man ; but the apprentice of the Thames might be there, with the ambition already developed to be the ferryman to the wits and actors from the Blackfriars to the Bankside. The "gentlemanlike sculler," as he was subsequently called, might listen even then with a chuckling delight to the sallies of "Master Benjamin Jonson," whom some eighteen years afterwards he wrote of as "my long-approved and assured good friend"—generous withal beyond his means, for "at my taking leave of him he gave me a piece of gold and two-and-twenty shillings to drink his health."‡ The merry party are soon landed at Paris Garden, and walking up the lane, which was a very little to the east of the present Blackfriars Bridge, they turn eastward before they reach the old stone cross, and in a minute or two are on the Bankside, close to the Falcon Inn, in

* Prologue to Henry VIII.

† It would appear from the Epilogue that 'Every Man out of his Humour' was acted at the Globe; and perhaps for the first time there. We are of course only here attempting a generalization not literally accurate.

‡ Taylor's 'Penniless Pilgrimage.'

John Taylor.

the liberty of the Clink. At a very short distance from this is the Bear Garden, and a little farther eastward the Globe. Part of the Falcon Tavern was standing in 1805, a short distance from the north end of Gravel-lane. Tradition holds it to have been the favourite resort of Shakspere and his companions. It is highly probable. He was a householder in the Clink liberty; but his disposition was eminently social, and sociality was the fashion of those days—in moderation, not a bad fashion. Gifford has noticed this with great justness: "Domestic entertainments were, at that time, rare; the accommodations of a private house were ill calculated for the purposes of a social meeting; and taverns and ordinaries are therefore almost the only places in which we hear of such assemblies. This, undoubtedly, gives an appearance of licentiousness to the age, which, in strictness, does not belong to it. Long after the period of which we are now speaking, we seldom hear of the eminent characters of the day in their domestic circles."* Jonson laughs at his own disposition to conviviality in connection with his habitual abstemiousness: "Canary, the very elixir and spirit of wine! This is that our poet calls Castalian liquor, when he comes abroad now and then, once in a fortnight, and makes a good meal among players, where he has *caninum appetitum;* marry, at home he keeps a good philosophical diet, beans and buttermilk; an honest pure rogue, he will take you off three, four, five of these, one after another, and look villainously when he has done, like a one-headed Cerberus."† He puts these words into the mouth of a buffoon. In his own person he speaks of himself in a nobler strain:

"I that spend half my nights, and all my days,
Here in a cell to get a dark pale face,
To come forth worth the ivy and the bays;
And, in this age, can hope no other grace." ‡

The alternations of excessive labour and joyous relaxation belong to the energies of the poetical temperament. Jonson has been accused of excess in his pleasures. Drummond ill-naturedly says, "Drink is one of the elements in which he liveth." But no one affirmed that in his convivial meetings there was not something higher and better than sensual indulgence.

"Ah, Ben!
Say how, or when
Shall we thy guests
Meet at those lyric feasts,
Made at the Sun,
The Dog, the Triple Tun?
Where we such clusters had,
As made us nobly wild, not mad;
And yet each verse of thine
Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine." §

* 'Memoirs of Ben Jonson,' p. exc.
† 'Every Man out of his Humour.' ‡ 'The Poetaster.'
§ Herrick's 'Hesperides.'

Amongst the group that might be assembled at the Falcon, let us first trace the lineaments of Thomas Dekker. He has not yet quarrelled with Jonson. He has no tbeen held up to contempt as Demetrius in the 'Poetaster,' nor returned the satire with more than necessary vehemence in the Satiro-Mastix. He is one who has looked upon the world with an observant eye; one of whom it has been said that his "pamphlets and plays alone would furnish a more complete view of the habits and customs of his contemporaries in vulgar and middle life than could easily be collected from all the grave annals of the times."* His 'Gull's Horn-Book' has not yet appeared; but its writer can season his talk with the most amusing relations of the humours of Paul's Walk of the ordinary, of the playhouse, of the tavern. He was not a very young man at the period of which we write. In 1631 he says, "I have been a priest in Apollo's temple many years; my voice is decaying with my age." He is confident in his powers; and claims to be a satirist by as indefeasible a title as that of his greater rival:—"I am snake-proof; and though, with Hannibal, you bring whole hogsheads of vinegar-railings, it is impossible for you to quench or come over my Alpine resolution. I will sail boldly and desperately alongst the shores of the isle of Gulls; and in defiance of those terrible blockhouses, their loggerheads, make a true discovery of their wild yet habitable country."† He has many a joke against the gallants whom he has noted even that afternoon sitting on the stage in all the glory of their coxcombry—on the very rushes where the comedy is to dance, beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality. The proportionable leg, the white hand, the love-lock of the essenced fop, have none of them passed unmarked. The red beard artistically dyed according to the most approved fashion supplies many a laugh; especially if the wearer had risen to be gone in the middle of the scene, saluting his gentle acquaintance to the discomfiture of the mimics. He, above all, is quizzed who hoards up the play scraps upon which his lean wit most savourily feeds in the presence of the Euphuesed gentlewomen. Dekker has been that morning in Paul's Walk, in the Mediterranean Aisle. He has noted one who walks there from day to day, even till lamp-light, for he is safe from his creditors. One more fortunate parades his silver spurs in the open choir, that he may challenge admiration as he draws forth his perfumed embroidered purse to pay the forfeit to the surpliced choristers. Another is waited upon by his tailor, who steps behind a pillar with his table-book to note the last fashion which hath made its appearance there, and to commend it to his worship's admiration. Equally familiar is the satirist with the ordinary. He tells of a most absolute gull that he has marked riding thither upon his Spanish jennet, with a French lacquey carrying his cloak, who having entered the public room walks up and down scornfully with a sneer and a sour face to promise quarrelling; who, when he does speak, discourses how often this lady has sent her coach for him, and how he has sweat in the tennis-court with that lord. An unfledged poet, too, he has marked, who drops a sonnet out of the large fold of his glove, which he at last reads to the company with a pretty

* 'Quarterly Review.'

† 'Gull's Hornbook.'

counterfeit lothness. He has a story of the last gull whom he saw there skeldered of his money at primero and hazard, who sat as patiently as a disarmed gentleman in the hands of the bailiffs. At the tavern he has drawn out a country gentleman that has brought his wife to town to learn the fashions, and see the tombs at Westminster, and the lions in the Tower; and is already glib with the names of the drawers, Jack and Will and Tom: the tavern is to him so delightful, with its suppers, its Canary, its tobacco, and its civil hostess at the bar, that it is odds but he will give up housekeeping. Above all, "the satirical rogue" is familiar with the habits of those who hear the chimes at midnight. He knows how they shun the waking watch and play tricks with the sleeping, and he hears the pretenders to gentility call aloud Sir Giles, or Sir Abraham, will you turn this way? Every form of pretence is familiar to him. He has watched his gull critical upon new books in a stationer's shop, and has tracked him through all his vagaries at the tobacco ordinary, the barber's, the fence-school, and the dancing-school. Thomas Dekker is certainly one of those who gather humours from all men; but his wit is not of the highest or the most delicate character; yet is he listened to and laughed at by many of nobler intellect who say little. He knows the town, and he makes the most of his knowledge. Though he is a "high flyer in wit," as Edward Philipps calls him, yet is he a poet. At this very time he is engaged with Henry Chettle and William Haughton in the composition of 'Patient Grissil' for Henslowe's theatre, in earnest of which they received three pounds of good and lawful money on the 19th of December, 1599. There is one of the partners in this drama who has drunk his inspiration at the well of Chaucer. The exquisite beauty of 'The Clerk's Tale' must have rendered it exceedingly difficult to have approached such a subject; but a man of real genius has produced the serious scenes of the comedy, and it is difficult to assign them to any other of the trio but Dekker. Might not some Jack Wilson* have, for the first time touched his lute to the following exquisite song, for the suffrages of the gay party at the Falcon?

"Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers?
Oh, sweet content!
Art thou rich, yet is thy mind perplexed?
Oh, punishment!
Dost thou laugh to see how fools are vexed
To add to golden numbers, golden numbers?
Oh, sweet content! Oh, sweet, &c.
Work apace, apace, apace, apace;
Honest labour bears a lovely face;
Then hey noney, noney, hey noney, noney.

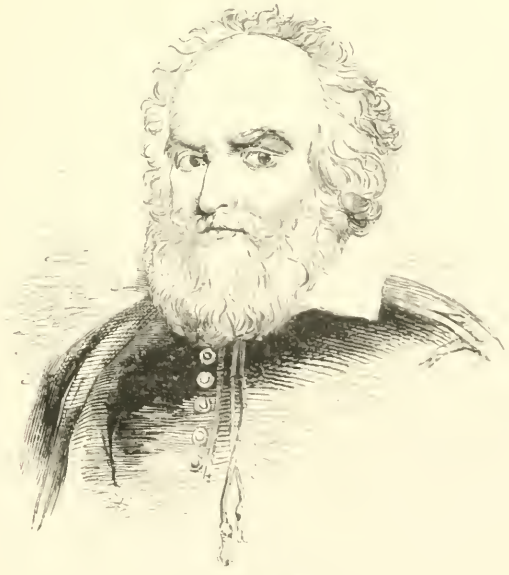
Canst drink the waters of the crisped spring?
Oh, sweet content!
Swimm'st thou in wealth, yet sink'st in thine own tears?
Oh, punishment!

---

* A singer of Shakspere's company. See Much Ado about Nothing, Introductory Notice.

Then he that patiently want's burden bears,
No burden bears, but is a king, a king!
Oh, sweet content! &c.
Work apace," &c.

There is one, we may believe, in that company of poets who certainly "is thought not the meanest of English poets of that time, and particularly for his dramatic writings." George Chapman, as Anthony Wood tells us, "was a person of most reverend aspect, religious and temperate, qualities rarely meeting in a poet." Anthony Wood has a low notion of the poetical character, as many other prosaic people have. He tells us of an unhappy verse-maker of small merit who was "exceedingly given to the vices of poets." Chapman was, however, the senior of the illustrious band who lighted up the close of the sixteenth century, and might be more reverend than many of them. He was seven years older than Shakspere, being born in 1557. Yet his inventive faculties were brilliant to the last. Jonson told Drummond, in 1619, that "next himself only Fletcher and Chapman could make a masque." He said also, what was more important, that "Chapman and Fletcher were loved of him." No one can doubt the vigour of the poet who translated twelve books of the Iliad in six weeks,—the daring fiery spirit of him who, in the opinion of the more polished translator, gave us a Homer such as he might have been before he had come to the years of discretion. This is meant by Pope for censure. Meres, in 1598, enumerates Chapman amongst the "tragic poets," and also amongst the "best poets for comedy." We have no evidence that he wrote before the period when Shakspere raised the drama out of chaos. He had not the power to become a great dramatist in the strict sense of the word; for his



George Chapman.

genius was essentially didactic. He could not go out of himself to paint all the varieties of passion and character in vivid action; but he could analyze the passion, exhibit its peculiarities, describe its current, with wondrous force and originality, throwing in touches of the purest poetry, clothed in the most splendid combinations of language. Dryden has not done justice to him, when he says that "a dwarfish thought dressed up in gigantic words is his characteristic." There are the gigantic words, but the thought is rarely dwarfish. Had he become a dramatist ten years earlier, as he well might from the period in which he was born, we should have found more extravagance and less poetical fire. Shakspere rendered the drama not so easy of approach by inferior men, as it was in the early days of the Greenes and Peeles. Chapman with his undramatic mind has done wonders in his own way.

Beside the man of reverend aspect sits a young scholar, who is anxious to say, I too am a poet. John Fletcher was born in 1576. His father, the Bishop of London—he who poured into the ears of the unhappy Mary of Scots on the scaffold that *verbosam orationem*, as Camden has it, which had more regard to his own preferment than the Queen's conversion—he who, marrying a second time, fell under his royal mistress's displeasure, and died of grief and excessive tobacco, in 1596, "seeking to lose his sorrow in a mist of smoke," *—he has left his son John to carry his "sail of phantasy" into the dangerous waters of the theatre. The union of real talent with fashionable pretension, which in time made him one of the most popular of dramatists, and the lyrical genius which will place him for ever amongst the first of English poets, were budding only at the close of the sixteenth century. We can scarcely believe that his genius was only called out by the "wonderful consimility of fancy" between him and Francis Beaumont; and that his first play was produced only in 1607, when he was thirty-one and Beaumont twenty-one. It is possible that in his earlier days he wrote in conjunction with some of the veterans of the drama. Shakspere is held to have been associated with him in the 'Two Noble Kinsmen.' We have discussed that question elsewhere; and it is scarcely necessary for us to attempt any summary here, for the reason of our belief that the union, if any there were, was not with Shakspere. At this period Fletcher would be gathering materials, at any rate, for some of those pictures of manners which reveal to us too much of the profligacy of the fine people of the beginning of the seventeenth century. The society of the great minds into which he would be thrown at the Falcon, and the Mermaid, and the Apollo Saloon, would call out and cherish that freshness of his poetical nature which survives, and indeed often rides over, the sapless conventionalities and frigid licentiousness of his fashionable experience. In the company of Shakspere, and Jonson, and Chapman, and Donne, he would be taught there was something more in the friendship, and even in the mere intercourse of conviviality, of men of high intellect, than the town could give. He would learn from Jonson's 'Leges Convivales,' that there was a charm in the social hours of the "*eruditi, urbani, hilares, honesti,*" which was rarely found amidst the courtly hunters after plea-

* Fuller's 'Worthies.'

[John Fletcher.]

sure; and that a festival with them was something better than even the excitement of wine and music. A few years after this Fletcher ventured out of the track of that species of comedy in which he won his first success, giving a real poem to the public stage, which, with all its faults, was a noble attempt to emulate the lyrical and pastoral genius of Shakspere. To our minds there is as much covert advice, if not gentle reproof, to Fletcher, as there is of just and cordial praise, in Jonson's verses upon the condemnation of 'The Faithful Shepherdess' by the audience of 1610:—

> "The wise, and many-headed bench, that sits
> Upon the life and death of plays and wits,
> (Compos'd of gamester, captain, knight, knight's man.
> Lady, or pucelle, that wears mask or fan,
> Velvet, or taffata cap, rank'd in the dark
> With the shop's foreman, or some such brave spark
> That may judge for his sixpence) had, before
> They saw it half, damn'd thy whole play, and more:
> Their motives were, since it had not to do
> With vices, which they look'd for, and came to.
> I, that am glad thy innocence was thy guilt.
> And wish that all the Muses' blood were spilt
> In such a martyrdom, to vex their eyes,
> Do crown thy murder'd poem: which shall rise
> A glorified work to time, when fire
> Or moths shall eat what all those fools admire."

There is another young poet who has fairly won his title to a place amongst the most eminent of his day. John Donne is there, yet scarcely seven-and-twenty; who wrote the most vigorous satires that the English language had seen as early as 1593. No printed copy exists of them of an earlier date than that of his collected works in 1633; but there is an undoubted manuscript of the three first satires in the British Museum, bearing the title "Thon Dunne

his Satires, Anno Domini 1593." No one has left a more vigorous picture of this exact period than has Donne, the student of Lincoln's Inn, who has already looked upon the world with the eye of a philosopher. He stands in the middle street and points, as they pass along, to the "captain bright parcel gilt"—to the "brisk perfumed pert courtier"—to the

> "Velvet justice, with a long
> Great train of blue-coats twelve or fourteen strong"

to the "superstitious Puritan" with his "formal hat." He and his friend, the "changeling motley humourist," take their onward way, and thus he paints the characters they encounter. The condensation of the picture is perfect:—

> "Now we are in the street: he first of all,
> Improvidently proud, creeps to the wall,
> And so imprison'd and hemm'd in by me,
> Sells for a little state his liberty;
> Yet though he cannot skip forth now to greet
> Every fine silken painted fool we meet,
> He them to him with amorous smiles allures,
> And grins, smacks, shrugs, and such an itch endures
> As 'prentices or school-boys, which do know
> Of some gay sport abroad, yet dare not go;
> And as fiddlers stoop lowest at highest sound,
> So to the most brave stoops he nigh'st the ground;
> But to a grave man he doth move no more
> Than the wise politic horse would heretofore;
> Or thou, O elephant or ape! wilt do
> When any names the king of Spain to you.
> Now leaps he upright, jogs me, and cries, Do you see
> Yonder well-favour'd youth? Which? Oh! 't is he
> That dances so divinely. Oh! said I,
> Stand still; must you dance here for company?
> He droop'd, we went, till one (which did excel
> Th' Indians in drinking his tobacco well)
> Met us: they talk'd; I whisper'd Let us go;
> It may be you smell him not; truly I do.
> He hears not me; but on the other side
> A many-colour'd peacock having spy'd,
> Leaves him and me: I for my lost sheep stay;
> He follows, overtakes, goes on the way,
> Saying, Him whom I last left all repute
> For his device in handsoming a suit,
> To judge of lace, pink, panes, print, cut and plait,
> Of all the court to have the best conceit:
> Our dull comedians want him; let him go."

There is something in these Satires deeper than mere satirical description example:—

> "Sir, though (I thank God for it) I do hate
> Perfectly all this town, yet there 's one state
> In all ill things so excellently best,
> That hate towards them breeds pity towards the rest."

Donne's genius was too subjective for the drama; yet his delineations of indi-

vidual character are full of humour. Take the barrister, who "woos in language of the Pleas and Bench:"—

> "A motion, lady! Speak, Coscus. I have been
> In love e'er since tricesimo of the queen.
> Continual claims I 've made, injunctions got
> To stay my rival's suit, that he should not
> Proceed; spare me, in Hilary term I went;
> You said, if I return'd next 'size in Lent,
> I should be in remitter of your grace:
> In th' interim my letters should take place
> Of affidavits."

Jonson well knew Donne's powers. Drummond records that "He esteemeth John Donne the first poet in the world in some things: his verses of the 'Lost Chain' he hath by heart; and that passage of the 'Calm,' 'That dust and feathers do not stir, all was so quiet.' Affirmeth Donne to have written all his best pieces ere he was twenty-five years old." That "passage of the Calm" to which Jonson alludes, is found in his poetical letters "from the Island voyage with the Earl of Essex." Never were the changing aspects of the sea painted with more truth and precision than in the two 'Letters' of 'the Storm' and 'the Calm.' He made this island voyage in 1597. He is now again in London. What a life is before him of the most ardent love, of married poverty, of dedication to the sacred profession for which his mind was best fitted, of years of peace and usefulness! Jonson said that Donne, "for not being understood would perish." Not wholly so. There are some who will study him, whilst less profound thinkers are forgotten.

[Donne.]

The diary of Henslowe during the last three years of the sixteenth century contains abundant notices of Michael Drayton as a dramatist. According to this record, of which we have no reason to doubt the correctness, there were extant in 1597 'Mother Red Cap,' written by him in conjunction with Anthony Munday; and a play without a name, which the manager calls a "book wherein is a part of a Welchman," by Drayton and Henry Chettle. In 1598 we have 'The Famous Wars of Henry I. and the Prince of Wales,' by Drayton and Thomas Dekker; 'Earl Goodwin and his three Sons,' by Drayton, Chettle, Dekker, and Robert Wilson; the 'Second Part of Goodwin,' by Drayton; 'Pierce of Exton,' by the same four authors; 'The Funeral of Richard Cœur de Lion,' by Wilson, Chettle, Munday, and Drayton; 'The Mad Man's Morris,' 'Hannibal and Hermes,' and 'Pierce of Winchester,' by Drayton, Wilson, and Dekker; 'William Longsword,' by Drayton; 'Chance Medley,' by Wilson, Munday, Drayton, and Dekker; 'Worse Afeard than Hurt,' 'Three Parts of the Civil Wars of France,' and 'Connan, Prince of Cornwall,' by Drayton and Dekker. In 1600 we have the 'Fair Constance of Rome,' in two parts, by Munday, Hathway, Drayton, and Dekker. In 1601, 'The Rising of Cardinal Wolsey,' by Munday, Drayton, Chettle, and Wentworth Smith. In 1602, 'Two Harpies,' by Dekker, Drayton, Middleton, Webster, and Munday. This is a most extraordinary record of the extent of dramatic associations in those days; and it is more remarkable as it regards Drayton, that his labours, which, as we see, were not entirely in copartnership, did not gain for him even the title of a dramatic poet in the next generation. Langbaine mentions him not at all. Philipps says nothing of his plays. Meres indeed thus writes of him: "We may truly term Michael Drayton *Tragediographus*, for his passionate penning the downfalls of valiant Robert of Normandy, chaste Matilda, and great Gaveston." But this praise has clearly reference to the 'Heroical Epistles' and the 'Legends.' If 'The Merry Devil of Edmonton' be his, the comedy does not place his dramatic powers in any very striking light; but it gives abundant proofs, in common with all his works, of a pure and gentle mind, and a graceful imagination. Meres is enthusiastic about his moral qualities; and his testimony also shows that the character for upright dealing which Shakspere won so early was not universal amongst the poetical adventurers of that day: "As Aulus Persius Flaccus is reported among all writers to be of an honest and upright conversation, so Michael Drayton (quem toties honoris et amoris causa nomino), among scholars, soldiers, poets, and all sorts of people, is held for a man of virtuous disposition, honest conversation, and well-governed carriage, which is almost miraculous among good wits in these declining and corrupt times, when there is nothing but roguery in villainous man, and when cheating and craftiness is counted the cleanest wit, and soundest wisdom." The good wits, according to Meres, are only parcel of the corrupt and declining times. Yet, after all, his dispraise of the times is scarcely original: "You rogue, here's lime in this sack too. There is nothing but roguery to be found in villainous man."* Jonson was an exception to the best of his contemporaries when he said of Drayton that "he esteemed not of him." That Shakspere loved him we may

* Henry IV., Part I., Act II., Sc. IV.

[Drayton.]

readily believe. They were nearly of an age, Drayton being only one year his elder. They were born in the same county—they had each the same love of natural scenery, and the same attachment to their native soil. Drayton exclaims —

> "My native country then, which so brave spirits hath bred,
> If there be virtues yet remaining in thy earth,
> Or any good of thine thou bred'st into my birth,
> Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of thee;
> Of all thy later brood th' unworthiest though I be."

It is his own Warwickshire which he invokes. They had each the same familiar acquaintance with the old legends and chronicles of English history; the same desire to present them to the people in forms which should associate the poetical spirit with a just patriotism. It was fortunate that they walked by different paths to the same object. However Drayton might have been associated for a few years with the minor dramatists of Shakspere's day, it may be doubted whether his genius was at all dramatic. Yet was he truly a great poet in an age of great poets. Old Aubrey has given us one or two exact particulars of his life:—"He lived at the bay window house next the east end of St. Dunstan's Church, in Fleet Street." Would that bay window house were standing! Would that the other house of precious memory close by it, where Izaak Walton kept his haberdasher's shop, were standing also! He "who has not left a rivulet (so narrow that it may be stepped over) without honourable mention; and has animated hills and streams with life and passion above the dreams of old mythology;"* and he who delighted to sit and sing under the honeysuckle hedge while the shower fell so gently upon the teeming earth,—they loved not the hills and streams and verdant meadows the less because they daily looked upon the side of London life in the busiest of her thoroughfares. There is one minute touch in Aubrey's notice of Drayton that must not pass without mention:—"Natus in Warwickshire, at Atherstone-upon-Stour.

* Charles Lamb.

He was a butcher's son." The writers of biography have let Aubrey's testimony pass. In spite of it they tell us he "was of an ancient and worthy family, originally descended from the town of Drayton, in Leicestershire, which gave name to his progenitors."* Not so indifferent has biography been to the descent of William Shakspere as recorded by the same historiographer: he "was born at Stratford-upon Avon, in the county of Warwick: his father was a butcher." The original record in each case is of precisely equal value.

The 'Cleopatra' of Samuel Daniel places him amongst the dramatic poets of this period; but his vocation was not to the drama. He was induced, by the persuasion of the Countess of Pembroke,

"To sing of state, and tragic notes to frame."

After Shakspere had arisen he adhered to the model of the Greek theatre. According to Jonson, "Samuel Daniel was no poet." Jonson thought Daniel "envied him," as he wrote to the Countess of Rutland. He tells Drummond that "Daniel was at jealousies with him." Yet for all this even with Jonson he was "a good honest man." Spenser formed the same estimate of Daniel's genius as the Countess of Pembroke did:—

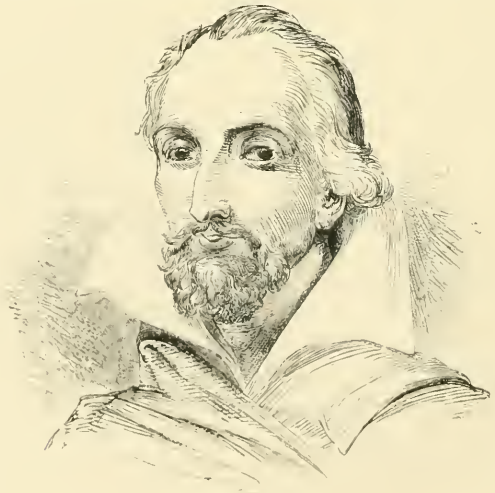
"Then rouse thy feathers quickly, Daniel,
And to what course thou please thyself advance:
But most, meseems, thy accent will excel
In tragic plaints, and passionate mischance." †

Daniel did wisely when he confined his "tragic plaints" to narrative poetry. He went over the same ground as Shakspere in his 'Civil Wars;' and there are passages of resemblance between the dramatist and the descriptive poet which are closer than mere accident could have produced.‡ The imitation, on whatever side it was, was indicative of respect.

* 'Biographia Britannica.'

† 'Colin Clout's come Home again.'

‡ See Introductory Notice to Richard II.



[Samuel Daniel.]

In the company at the Falcon we may place John Marston, a man of original talent, who had at that period won some celebrity. He was at this time probably about five and twenty, having taken his Bachelor's degree at Oxford in 1592. There is very little known with any precision about his life; but a pretty accurate opinion of his character may be collected from the notices of his contemporaries, and from his own writings. He began in the most dangerous path of literary ambition, that of satire, bitter and personal:—

"Let others sing, as their good genius moves,
Of deep designs, or else of clipping loves.
Fair fall them all that with wit's industry
Do clothe good subjects in true poesy;
But as for me, my vexed thoughtful soul
Takes pleasure in displeasing sharp control.
. . . . . .
Quake, guzzle-dogs, that live on spotted lime,
Scud from the lashes of my yerking rhyme." *

His first performance, 'The Metamorphoses of Pygmalion's Image,' has been thought by Warton to have been written in ridicule of Shakspere's Venus and Adonis. The author says,

"Know, I wrot
These idle rhymes, to note the odious spot
And blemish, that deforms the lineaments
Of modern poesy's habiliments."

In his parody, if parody it be, he has contrived to produce a poem, of which the licentiousness is the *only* quality. Thus we look upon a sleeping Venus of Titian, and see but the wonderful art of the painter; a dauber copies it, and then beauty becomes deformity. He is angry that his object is misunderstood, as well it might be:—

"O these same buzzing gnats
That sting my sleeping brows, these Nilus rats,
Half dung, that have their life from putrid slime,
These that do praise my loose lascivious rhyme,
For these same shades I seriously protest,
I slubbered up that chaos indigest,
To fish for fools, that stalk in goodly shape:
What though in velvet cloak, yet still an ape!"

He had the ordinary fate of satirists—to live in a state of perpetual warfare, and to have offences imputed to him of which he was blameless. The "galled jade" not only winces, but kicks. The comedy of 'The Malecontent,' written in 1600, appears to have been Marston's first play; it was printed in 1605. He says in the Preface, "In despite of my endeavours, I understand some have been most unadvisedly over-cunning in misinterpreting me, and with subtilty (as deep as hell) have maliciously spread ill rumours, which springing from themselves, might to

* 'Scourge of Villainy; Three Books of Satire:' 1598.

themselves have heavily returned."* Marston says in the Preface to one of his later plays, "So powerfully have I been enticed with the delights of poetry, and (I must ingenuously confess), above better desert, so fortunate in these stage-pleasings, that (let my resolutions be never so fixed, to call mine eyes unto myself) I much fear that most lamentable death of him—

'Qui nimis notus omnibus,
Ignotus moritur sibi.'"—*Seneca.*

He adds, "the over-vehement pursuit of these delights hath been the sickness of my youth." He unquestionably writes as one who is absorbed by his pursuit; over whom it has the mastery. In his plays, as well as in his satires, there is no languid task-work; but, as may be expected, he cannot go out of himself. It is John Marston who is lashing vice and folly, whatever character may fill the scene; and from first to last in his reproof of licentiousness we not only see his familiarity with many gross things, but cannot feel quite assured that he looks upon them wholly with pure eyes. His temper was no doubt capricious. It is clear that Jonson had been attacked by him previous to the production of 'The Poetaster.' He endured the lash which was inflicted on him in return, and became again, as he probably was before, the friend of Jonson, to whom he dedicates 'The Malecontent' in 1605. Gifford has clearly made out that the Crispinus of 'The Poetaster' was Marston. Tucca thus describes him, in addressing the player: "Go, and be acquainted with him then; he is a gentleman, parcel poet, you slave; his father was a man of worship, I tell thee. Go, he pens high, lofty, *in a new stalking strain*, bigger than half the rhymers in the town again: he was born to fill thy mouth, Minotaurus, he was; he will teach thee to tear and rand. Rascal, to him, cherish his muse, go; thou hast forty—forty shillings, I mean, stinkard; give him in earnest, do, he shall write for thee, slave! If he pen for thee once, thou shalt not need to travel with thy pumps full of gravel any more, after a blind jade and a hamper, and stalk upon boards and barrel heads to an old cracked trumpet." Jonson, in the same play, has parodied Marston's manner, and has introduced many of his expressions, in the following verses which are produced as those of Crispinus:—

"Ramp up, my genius, be not retrograde;
But boldly nominate a spade a spade.
What, shall thy lubrical and glibbery muse
Live, as she were defunct, like punk in stews!
Alas! that were no modern consequence,
To have cothurnal buskins frighted hence.
No, teach thy Incubus to poetize,
And throw abroad thy spurious snotteries,
Upon that puft-up lump of balmy froth.
Or clumsy chilblain'd judgment; that with oath
Magnificates his merit; and bespawls
The conscious time with humorous foam, and brawls,
As if his organons of sense would crack
The sinews of my patience. Break his back,

* See Note at the end of this Chapter.

O poets all and some! for now we list
Of strenuous vengeance to clutch the fist."

The following advice is subsequently given to him :—

"You must not hunt for wild outlandish terms,
To stuff out a peculiar dialect;
But let your matter run before your words.
And if at any time you chance to meet
Some Gallo-Belgic phrase, you shall not straight
Rack your poor verse to give it entertainment,
But let it pass; and do not think yourself
Much damnified if you do leave it out,
When nor your understanding nor the sense
Could well receive it."

Marston, with all his faults, was a scholar and a man of high talent, and it is pleasant to know that he and Ben were friends after this wordy war. He appears to us to describe himself in the following narrative of a scholar in 'What You Will:'—

"I was a scholar: seven useful springs
Did I deflour in quotations
Of cross'd opinions 'bout the soul of man;
The more I learnt the more I learnt to doubt,
Knowledge and wit, faith's foes, turn faith about.
. . . . . .
Nay, mark, list! Delight, Delight, my spaniel, slept,
whilst I bauz'd * leaves,
Toss'd o'er the dunces, por'd on the old print
Of titled words, and still my spaniel slept.
Whilst I wasted lamp-oil, 'bated my flesh,
Shrunk up my veins, and still my spaniel slept.
And still I held converse with Zabarell,
Aquinas, Scotus, and the musty saw
Of antic Donate, still my spaniel slept.
Still on went I, first *an sit anima*,
Then, an it were mortal; oh, hold, hold,
At that they are at brain buffets, fell by the ears,
Amain, pell-mell together; still my spaniel slept.
Then whether 't were corporeal, local, fix'd,
Extraduce; but whether 't had free will
Or no, O philosophers
Stood banding factions, all so strongly propp'd,
I stagger'd, knew not which was firmer part;
But thought, quoted, read, observ'd, and pried,
Stuff'd noting books, and still my spaniel slept.
At length he wak'd, and yawn'd, and by yon sky,
For aught I knew, he knew as much as I.
. . . . . .

* Mr. Dilke, in his valuable 'Selection from the Early Dramatic Writers,' prints three of Marston's plays. He says this word may be derived from *baiser*, to kiss; and that *basse* has been used by Chaucer in this sense.

How 't was created, how the soul exists;
One talks of motes, the soul was made of motes;
Another fire, t' other light, a third a spark of star-like nature;
Hippo, water; Anaximenes, air;
Aristoxenus, music; Critias, I know not what;
A company of odd Phrenetici
Did eat my youth; and when I crept abroad,
Finding my numbness in this nimble age,
I fell a railing."

The light jest, the glancing wit, the earnest eloquence, the deep criticism, which would wear away the hours in such a company as that assembled at the Falcon, are to be interrupted. The festivity is about to close; when Marston, in the words of one of his own characters, says

"Stay, take an old rhyme first: though dry and lean,
'T will serve to close the stomach of the scene;"

and then bursts out into a song which bears the stamp of his personal character:

"Music, tobacco, sack, and sleep,
The tide of sorrow backward keep.
If thou art sad at others' fate,
Rivo! drink deep, give care the mate.

On us the end of time is come,
Fond fear of that we cannot shun;
Whilst quickest sense doth freshly last,
Clip time about, hug pleasure fast." *

Shakspere suddenly leaves the room, ere the song be ended; for one who bears the badge of the Earl of Essex waits without. His message is a brief but a sad one He returns just to hear the last lines of Marston's song,

"When I can breathe no longer, then
Heaven take all; there put amen,"

and to break up all revelry with the message—Spenser is dead.

In the obscure lodging-house in King's Street, Westminster, where he lay down heart-broken, alone, has the poor fugitive died in his forty-sixth year. Jonson says, "He died for lack of bread in King's Street, and refused twenty pieces sent to him by my Lord of Essex, and said he was sorry he had no time to spend them." The lack of bread could scarcely be. He could only have been a very short time in London when he came to seek that imperfect compensation which the government might afford him for some of his wrongs. His house was burnt; his wife and two children had fled from those outrages which had made

"The cooly shade
Of the green alders by the Mulla's shore"

* 'What You Will.'

a place of terror and fatal recollections; his infant had perished in the flames which destroyed his property. But it seems impossible that one in his social position could die for lack of bread. He died most probably of that which kills as surely as hunger—the "*hysterica passio*" of Lear. In a few days most of those we have named would be gathered round Spenser's grave in Westminster Abbey: "his hearse attended by poets, and mournful elegies, and poems, with the pens that wrote them, thrown into his tomb." * One of the ablest writers of our day, in his quaint and pleasant 'Citation and Examination of William Shakspeare,' &c., says, "William Shakspeare was the only poet who abstained from throwing in either pen or poem,—at which no one marvelled, he being of low estate, and the others not having yet taken him by the hand." This is the language only of romance; for assuredly when Shakspere stood by the grave of Spenser, he of all the poets then living must have been held to be the head. Five years before, Spenser himself had without doubt thus described him:—

> "And there, though last not least, is *Aëtion;*
> A gentler shepherd may nowhere be found:
> Whose Muse, full of high thoughts' invention,
> Doth like himself *heroically sound.*" †

Jonson says—

> "He seems *to shake a lance*
> As brandish'd at the eyes of ignorance"

Fuller compares him to the poet Martial "in the *warlike sound of his surname*, whence some may conjecture him of a military extraction, hasti-vibrans, or Shake-speare." We cannot doubt of the allusion. He could not have meant to compare the poet with the Roman painter Aëtion. The fancy of Spenser might readily connect the "high thoughts" with the soaring eagle—ἀετός—and we might almost fancy that there was some association of the image with Shakspere's armorial bearings—"his crest or cognizance, a falcon, his wings displayed."

The spring of 1599 saw Shakspere's friends and patrons, Essex and Southampton, in honour and triumph. "The 27th of March, 1599, about two o'clock in the afternoon, Robert Earl of Essex, Vicegerent of Ireland, &c., took horse in Seeding Lane, and from thence, being accompanied with divers noblemen and many others, himself very plainly attired, rode through Grace Street, Cornhill, Cheapside, and other high streets, in all which places, and in the fields, the people pressed exceedingly to behold him, especially in the highways for more than four miles space, crying, and saying, God bless your Lordship, God preserve your honour, &c., and some followed him until the evening, only to behold him. When he and his company came forth of London, the sky was very calm and clear, but before he could get past Iseldon [Islington] there arose a great black cloud in the north-east, and suddenly came lightning and thunder, with a great shower of hail and rain, the which some held as an ominous

* Camden. † 'Colin Clout's come Home again,' 1594.

prodigy." * It was perhaps with some reference to such ominous forebodings that in the chorus to the fifth Act of Henry V.—which of course must have been performed between the departure of Essex in March, and his return in September—Shakspere thus anticipates the triumph of Essex :—

> " But now behold,
> In the quick forge and working house of thought,
> How London doth pour out her citizens !
> The mayor and all his brethren, in best sort,—
> Like to the senators of the antique Rome,
> With the plebeians swarming at their heels,—
> Go forth, and fetch their conquering Cæsar in :
> As, by a lower but by loving likelihood,
> Were now the general of our gracious empress
> (As, in good time, he may) from Ireland coming,
> Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
> How many would the peaceful city quit
> To welcome him !"

* Stow's 'Annals.

[John Lowin.

NOTE ON MARSTON'S 'MALECONTENT.'

MARSTON'S comedy, as it appears by the edition of 1605, was then played by Shakspere's company, "the King's Majesty's Servants;" but it had been previously played by another company, as we learn from the very singular Induction, in which some of the most eminent of Shakspere's fellows come upon the stage in their own characters. We have here William Sly, Harry Condell, and Dick Burbage; with Sinklow (of whom little is known beyond his twice being mentioned by accident instead of the dramatic character in the folio of Shakspere) and John Lowin, famous for his performance of Falstaff. The Induction itself presents so curious a picture of the theatre in Shakspere's time, that we may properly fill a little space with a portion of it :—

"*Enter* W. SLY; *a* Tire-man *following him with a stool.*

Tire-man. Sir, the gentlemen will be angry if you sit here.

Sly. Why, we may sit upon the stage at the private house. Thou dost not take me for a country gentleman, dost? Dost thou fear hissing? I'll hold my life thou took'st me for one of the players.

Tire-man. No, sir.

Sly. By God's-slid, if you had I would have given you but sixpence for your stool. Let them that have stale suits sit in the galleries. Hiss me! He that will be laughed out of a tavern, or an ordinary, shall seldom feed well, or be drunk in good company. Where's Harry Condell, Dick Burbage, and William Sly? Let me speak with some of them.

Tire-man. An't please you to go in, sir, you may.

Sly. I tell you no; I am one that hath seen this play often, and can give them intelligence for their action. I have most of the jests here in my table-book.

Enter SINKLOW.

Sinklow. Save you, coz.

Sly. O! cousin, come, you shall sit between my legs here.

Sinklow. No indeed, cousin; the audience then will take me for a viol de gambo, and think that you play upon me.

Sly. Nay, rather that I work upon you, coz.

Sinklow. We staid for you at supper last night at my cousin Honeymoon's, the woollen-draper. After supper we drew cuts for a score of apricots; the longest cut still to draw an apricot; by this light, 't was Mrs. Frank Honeymoon's fortune still to have the longest cut. I did measure for the women. What be these, coz?

Enter D. BURBAGE, H. CONDELL, *and* J. LOWIN.

Sly. The players. God save you.

Burbage. You are very welcome.

Sly. I pray you know this gentleman, my cousin; 't is Mr. Doomsday's son, the usurer.

Condell. I beseech you, sir, be cover'd.

Sly. No, in good faith, for mine ease; look you, my hat's the handle to this fan: God's so, what a beast was I, I did not leave my feather at home! Well, but I take an order with you. [*Puts a feather in his pocket.*

Burbage. Why do you conceal your feather, sir?

Sly. Why! do you think I'll have jests broken upon me in the play to be laughed at? This play hath beaten all young gallants out of the feathers. Blackfriars hath almost spoiled Blackfriars for feathers.

Sinklow. God's so! I thought 'twas for somewhat our gentlewomen at home counselled me to wear my feather to the play; yet I am loath to spoil it.

Sly. Why, coz?

Sinklow. Because I got it in the tilt-yard: there was a herald broke my pate for taking it up. But I have worn it up and down the Strand, and met him forty times since, and yet he dares not challenge it.

Sly. Do you hear, sir? this play is a bitter play.

Condell. Why, sir, 't is neither satire nor moral, but the mere passage of an history: yet there are a sort of discontented creatures that bear a stingless envy to great ones, and these will wrest the doings of any man to their base, malicious appliment; but should their interpretation come to the test, like your marmoset, they presently turn their teeth to their tail and eat it.

Sly. I will not go far with you; but I say any man that hath wit may censure, if he sit in the twelve-penny room: and I say again, the play is bitter.

Burbage. Sir, you are like a patron that, presenting a poor scholar to a benefice, enjoins him not to rail against anything that stands within compass of his patron's folly. Why should not we enjoy the ancient freedom of poesy? Shall we protest to the ladies, that their painting makes them angels? or to my young gallant, that his expense in the brothel should gain him reputation? No, sir, such vices as stand not accountable to law should be cured as men heal tetters, by casting ink upon them. Would you be satisfied in anything else, sir?

Sly. Ay, marry would I: I would know how you came by this play?

Condell. Faith, sir, the book was lost; and because 'twas pity so good a play should be lost, we found it, and play it.

Sly. I wonder you play it, another company having interest in it.

[Essex House.]

CHAPTER VII.

EVIL DAYS.

About the close of the year 1599, the Blackfriars Theatre was remarkable for the constant presence of two men of high rank, who were there seeking amusement and instruction as some solace for the bitter mortifications of disappointed ambition. "My Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland came not to the Court; the one doth but very seldom: they pass away the time in London merely in going to plays every day."* Essex had arrived from Ireland on the 28th of September, 1599—not

"Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,"—

not surrounded with swarms of citizens who

"Go forth, and fetch their conquering Cæsar in,"—

* Letter of Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sydney, in the Sydney Papers.

but a fugitive from his army; one who in his desire for peace had treated with rebels, and had brought down upon him the censures of the Court; one who knew that his sovereign was surrounded with his personal enemies, and who in his reckless anger once thought to turn his army homeward to compel justice at their hands; one who at last rushed alone into the Queen's presence, "full of dirt and mire," and found that he was in the toils of his foes. From that Michaelmas till the 26th of August, 1600, Essex was in the custody of the Lord Keeper; in free custody as it was termed, but to all intents a prisoner. It was at this period that Southampton and Rutland passed "away the time in London merely in going to plays every day." Southampton in 1598 had married Elizabeth Vernon, a cousin of Lord Essex. The marriage was without the consent of the Queen; and therefore Southampton was under the ban of the Court, having been preremptorily dismissed by Elizabeth from the office to which Essex had appointed him in the expedition to Ireland. Rutland was also connected with Essex by family ties, having married the daughter of Lady Essex, by her first husband, the accomplished Sir Philip Sidney. The season when these noblemen sought recreation at the theatre was one therefore of calamity to themselves, and to the friend who was at the head of their party in the state. At Shakspere's theatre there were at this period abundant materials for the highest intellectual gratification. Of Shakspere's own works we know that at the opening of the seventeenth century there were twenty plays in existence. Thirteen (considering Henry IV. as two parts) are recorded by Meres in 1598; Much Ado About Nothing, and Henry V. (not in Meres' list), were printed in 1600; and we have to add the three parts of Henry VI., The Taming of the Shrew, and the original Hamlet, which are also wanting in Meres' record, but which were unquestionably produced before this period. We cannot with extreme precision fix the date of any novelty from the pen of Shakspere when Southampton and Rutland were amongst his daily auditors; but there is every reason to believe that As You Like It belongs as nearly as possible to this exact period. It is pleasant to speculate upon the tranquillizing effect that might have been produced upon the minds of the banished courtiers, by the exquisite philosophy of this most delicious play. It is pleasant to imagine Southampton visiting Essex in the splendid prison of the Lord Keeper's house, and there repeating to him from time to time those lessons of wisdom that were to be found in the woods of Arden. The two noblemen who had once revelled in all the powers and privileges of Court favouritism had now felt by how precarious a tenure is the happiness held of

> "That poor man that hangs on princes' favours."

The great dramatic poet of their time had raised up scenes of surpassing loveliness, where happiness might be sought for even amidst the severest penalties of fortune:—

> "Now, my co-mates, and brothers in exile,
> Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?"

It was for them to feel how deep a truth was there in this lesson :—

"Sweet are the uses of adversity."

Happy are those that can feel such a truth ;

"That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style."

And yet the same poet had created a character that could interpret the feelings of those who had suffered undeserved indignities, and had learnt that the greatest crime in the world's eye was to be unfortunate. There was one in that play who could moralize the spectacle of

"A poor sequester'd stag,
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,"

and who thus pierced through the hollowness of "this our life :"—

"'Poor deer,' quoth he, 'thou mak'st a testament
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
To that which had too much.' Then, being there alone,
Left and abandon'd of his velvet friend ;
'"T is right,' quoth he ; 'thus misery doth part
The flux of company :' Anon, a careless herd,
Full of the pasture, jumps along by him,
And never stays to greet him ; 'Ay,' quoth Jaques,
'Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens ;
"T is just the fashion : Wherefore do you look
Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?'"

We could almost slide into the belief that As You Like It had an especial reference to the circumstances in which Essex and Southampton were placed in the spring of 1600. There is nothing desponding in its tone, nothing essentially misanthropical in its philosophy. Jaques stands alone in his railing against mankind. The healing influences of nature fall sweetly and fruitfully upon the exiled Duke and his co-mates. But, nevertheless, the ingratitude of the world is emphatically dwelt upon, even amidst the most soothing aspects of a pure and simple life "under the greenwood tree." The song of Amiens has perhaps a deeper meaning even than the railing of Jaques :—

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot :
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remember'd not."

There was one who had in him much of the poetical temperament—a gorgeous imagination for the externals of poetry—upon whose ear, if he ever sought common amusement in the days of his rising power these words must have fallen like the warning voice that cried "woe." There was one who, when Essex in the days of his greatness had asked a high place for him and had

been refused, received from the favourite a large private gift thus bestowed:—"I know that you are the least part of your own matter, but you fare ill because you have chosen me for your mean and dependence. You have spent your time and thoughts in my matters. I die, if I do not somewhat towards your fortune. You shall not deny to accept a piece of land, which I will bestow upon you." The answer of him who accepted a park from the hands of the generous man who had failed to procure him a place, was prophetic. The Duke of Guise, he said, was the greatest usurer in France, "because he had turned all his estates into obligations, having left himself nothing. . . . I would not have you imitate this course, for you will find many bad debtors." It was this man who, in the darkest hour of Essex, when he was hunted to the death, said to the Lord Steward, "My lord, I have never yet seen in any case such favour shown to any prisoner."

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude."

Who can doubt that the ingratitude had begun long before the fatal catastrophe of the intrigues of Cecil and Raleigh? Francis Bacon, the ingrate, justifies himself by the "rules of duty" which opposed him to his benefactor, at the bar in his "public service." The same rules of duty were powerful enough to lead him to blacken his friend's character after his death, by garbling with his own hand the depositions against the victim of his faction, and publishing them as authentic records of the trial.* Essex, before the last struggles, had acquired experience of "bad debtors." The poet of As You Like It might have done something in teaching him to bear this and other afflictions bravely:—

"Thou seest, we are not all alone unhappy
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in."

Essex was released from custody in the August of 1600; but an illegal sentence had been passed upon him by commissioners, that he should not execute the offices of a Privy Councillor, or of Earl Marshal, or of Master of the Ordnance. The Queen signified to him that he was not to come to Court without leave. He was a marked and a degraded man. The wily Cecil, who at this very period was carrying on a correspondence with James of Scotland, that might have cost him his head, was laying every snare for the ruin of Essex. He desired to do what he ultimately effected, to goad his fiery spirit into madness. Essex was surrounded with warm but imprudent friends. They relied upon his unbounded popularity not only as a shield against arbitrary power, but as a weapon to beat down the strong arm of authority. During the six months which elapsed between the release of Essex and the fatal outbreak of 1601, Essex House saw many changing scenes, which marked the fitful temper and the wavering counsels of its unhappy owner. Within a month after he had

* See Jardine's 'Criminal Trials,' vol. i., p. 387.

[Robert Cecil.]

been discharged from custody, the Queen refused to renew a valuable patent to Essex, saying that "to manage an ungovernable beast he must be stinted in his provender." On the other hand, rash words that had been held to fall from the lips of Essex were reported to the Queen. He was made to say, "She was now grown an old woman, and was as crooked within as without."* The door of reconciliation was almost closed for ever. Essex House had been strictly private during its master's detention at the Lord Keeper's. Its gates were now opened, not only to his numerous friends and adherents, but to men of all persuasions, who had injuries to redress or complaints to prefer. Essex had always professed a noble spirit of toleration, far in advance of his age; and he now received with a willing ear the complaints of all those who were persecuted by the government for religious opinions, whether Roman Catholics or Puritans. He was in communication with James of Scotland, urging him to some open assertion of his presumptive title to the crown of England. It was altogether a season of restlessness and intrigue, of bitter mortifications and rash hopes. Between the closing of the Globe Theatre and the opening of the Blackfriars, Shakspere was in all likelihood tranquil amidst his family at Stratford. The

* There is a slight resemblance in a passage in The Tempest:

"And as with age his body uglier grows.
So his mind cankers."

winter comes, and then even the players are mixed up with the dangerous events of the time. Sir Gilly Merrick, one of the adherents of Essex, was accused, amongst other acts of treason, with "having procured the *out-dated* tragedy of the 'Deposition of Richard II.' to be publicly acted at his own charge, for the entertainment of the conspirators."* In the 'Declaration of the Treasons of the late Earl of Essex and his Complices,' which Bacon acknowledges to have been written by him at the Queen's command, there is the following statement:—"The afternoon before the rebellion, Merrick, with a great company of others, that afterwards were all in the action, had procured to be played before them the play of deposing King Richard the Second;—when it was told him by one of the players, that the play was *old*, and they should have loss in playing it, because few would come to it, there was forty shillings extraordinary given to play, and so thereupon played it was." In the 'State Trials' this matter is somewhat differently mentioned: "The story of Henry IV. being set forth in a play, and in that play there being set forth the killing of the King upon a stage; the Friday before, Sir Gilly Merrick and some others of the Earl's train having an humour to see a play, they must needs have the play of Henry IV. The players told them that was stale; they could get nothing by playing that; but no play else would serve: and Sir Gilly Merrick gives forty shillings to Phillips the player to play this, besides whatsoever he could get." Augustine Phillips was one of Shakspere's company; and yet it is perfectly evident that it was not Shakspere's Richard II., nor Shakspere's Henry IV., that was acted on this occasion. In his Henry IV. there is no "killing of the king upon a stage. His Richard II., which was published in 1597, was certainly not an out-dated play in 1601. A second edition of it had appeared in 1598, and it was no doubt highly popular as an acting play. But if any object was to be gained by the conspirators in the stage representation of the 'deposing King Richard II.,' Shakspere's play would not assist that object. The editions of 1597 and 1598 do not contain the deposition scene. That portion of this noble history which contains the scene of Richard's surrender of the crown was not printed till 1608; and the edition in which it appears bears in the title the following intimation of its novelty: 'The Tragedie of King Richard the Second, with *new additions of the Parliament Sceane, and the deposing of King Richard.* As it hath been *lately acted* by the Kinges servantes, at the Globe, by William Shake-speare.' In Shakspere's Parliament scene our sympathies are wholly with King Richard. This, even if the scene were acted in 1601, would not have forwarded the views of Sir Gilly Merrick, if his purpose were really to hold up to the people an example of a monarch's dethronement. But nevertheless, it may be doubted whether such a subject could be safely played at all by the Lord Chamberlain's players during this stormy period of the reign of Elizabeth. Her sensitiveness on this head was most remarkable. There is a very curious record existing of "that which passed from the Excel-

* This is the translation of the passage in Camden's 'Annales,' &c., as printed in Kennett's 'History of England.' The accusation against Merrick is thus stated in the original:—"Quod exoletam tragœdiam de tragicâ abdicatione regis Ricardi Secundi in publico theatro coram conjuratis datâ pecuniâ agi curasset."

lent Majestie of Queen Elizabeth, in her Privie Chamber at East Greenwich, 4° Augusti, 1601, 43° Reg. sui, towards William Lambarde," * which recounts his presenting the Queen his 'Pandecta' of historical documents to be placed in the Tower, which the Queen read over, making observations and receiving explanations. The following dialogue then takes place :—

"*W. L.* He likewise expounded these all according to their original diversities, which she took in gracious and full satisfaction; so her Majesty fell upon the reign of King Richard II., saying, 'I am Richard II., know ye not that?'

"*W. L.* 'Such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind gentleman, the most adorned creature that ever your Majesty made.'

"*Her Majesty.* 'He that will forget God will also forget his benefactors: this tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses.'"

The "wicked imagination" that Elizabeth was Richard the Second is fixed upon Essex by the reply of Lambarde, and the rejoinder of the Queen makes it clear that the "wicked imagination" was attempted through the performance of the Tragedy of the Deposition of Richard the Second: "This tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses." The Queen is speaking six months after the outbreak of Essex; and it is not improbable that the outdated play—that performance which in the previous February the players "should have loss in playing"—had been rendered popular through the partisans of Essex after his fall, and had been got up in open streets and houses with a dangerous avidity. But there is a circumstance which renders it tolerably evident that, although Sir Gilly Merrick might have given forty shillings to Phillips to perform that stale play, the company of Shakspere were not the performers. In the Office Book of the Treasurer of the Chamber † there is an entry on the 31st of March, 1601, of a payment to John Heminge and Richard Cowley, servants to the Lord Chamberlain, for three plays showed before her Highness on St. Stephen's Day at night [26th of December, 1600], Twelfth Day at night [January 6th, 1601], and Shrove Tuesday at night [Easter Day being on the 12th of April in 1601, Shrove Tuesday would be on the 3rd of March]. Shakspere's company were thus performing before the Queen within a week of the period when Essex was beheaded. They would not have been so performing had they exhibited the offensive tragedy.

In her conversation with Lambarde, Elizabeth uttered a great truth, which might not be unmingled with a retrospect of the fate of Essex. Speaking of the days of her ancestors, she said,—"In those days force and arms did prevail, but now the wit of the fox is everywhere on foot, so as hardly a faithful or virtuous man may be found." When Raleigh was called upon the trial of Essex, and "his oath given him," Essex exclaimed, "What booteth it to swear the fox?" The fox had even then accomplished his purpose. He had driven his victim onwards to that fatal movement of Sunday the 8th of February, which, begun without reasonable plan or fixed purpose, ended in casual bloodshed and death by the law. We may readily believe that the anxiety of Shakspere for

* This was first printed from the original in Nicholls's 'Progresses of Queen Elizabeth.' Lambarde died in a fortnight after this interview.

† Cunningham's 'Revels at Court.'

[Essex.]

his friends and benefactors would have led him to the scene of that wild commotion. He might have seen Essex and Southampton, with Danvers, Blount, Catesby, Owen Salisbury, and a crowd of followers, riding into Fleet Street, shouting, "For the Queen! for the Queen!" He might have heard the people crying on every side, "God save your honour! God bless your honour!" An hour or two later he might have listened to the proclamation in Gracechurch Street and Cheapside, that the Earl and all his company were traitors. By two o'clock of that fatal Sunday, Shakspere might have seen his friends fighting their way back through the crowds of armed men who suddenly assailed them, and, taking boat at Queenhithe, reach Essex House in safety. But it was surrounded with soldiers and artillery; shots were fired at the windows; the cries of women within mingled with the shouts of fury without. At last came the surrender, at ten o'clock at night. The axe with the edge turned towards the prisoners followed as a matter of course.

The period at which Essex fell upon the block, and Southampton was under condemnation, must have been a gloomy period in the life of Shakspere. The friendship of Southampton in all likelihood raised the humble actor to that just appreciation of himself which could alone prevent his nature being subdued to what it worked in. There had been a compromise between the inequality of rank and the inequality of intellect, and the fruit had been a continuance and a strengthening of that "love" which seven years earlier had been described as "without end." Those ties were now broken by calamity. The accomplished noble, a prisoner looking daily for death, could not know the depth of the love of his "especial friend." * He was beyond the reach of any service that this

* The expression is used by Southampton in his Letter to Lord Ellesmere introducing Shakspere and Burbage in 1608. See Collier's 'New Facts,' p. 33.

friend could render him. All was gloom and uncertainty. It has been said, and we believe without any intention to depreciate the character of the great poet, that "There seems to have been a period of Shakspeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world or his own conscience; the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches;—these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear and Timon, but that of one primary character, the censurer of mankind."* The genius of Shakspere was so essentially dramatic, that neither Lear, nor Timon, nor Jaques, nor the Duke in Measure for Measure, nor Hamlet, whatever censure of mankind they may express, can altogether be held to reflect "a period of Shakspeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world." That period is referred to the beginning of the seventeenth century, to which the plays belong that are said to exhibit these attributes.† But from this period there is certainly a more solemn cast of thought in all the works of the great poet. We wholly reject the opinion that this tone of mind in the slightest degree partakes of "the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches." There is a strong but yet tolerant censure of the heartlessness of worldly men, and the delusions of friendship, such as we have pointed out, in As You Like It. There is the fierce misanthropy of Timon, so peculiar to his character and situation that it is quite lifted out of the range of a poet's self-consciousness: "the experience of man's worser nature" was not to make of Shakspere one "who all the human sons doth hate." Measure for Measure was, we believe, a covert satire upon the extremes of weak and severe government: it interprets nothing of unrequited affections and an evil conscience. The bitter denunciations of Lear are the natural reflections of his own disturbed thoughts, seeking to recover the balance of his feelings out of the vehemence of his passion. The Hamlet, such as we have it in its altered state, as compared with the earlier sketch, does indeed contain passages which have a peculiar fitness for Hamlet's utterance, but which, at the same time, might afford relief in their expression to the poet's own wrestlings with the problem of existence. An example or two of these new passages will suffice:

> "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seems to me all the uses of this world!
> Fye on 't! O fye! 't is an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank, and gross in nature,
> Possess it merely."

Again:—

"I have of late (but, wherefore, I know not) lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a

* Hallam's 'Literature of Europe,' vol. iii., p. 568.
† Mr. Hallam refers to Hamlet in its altered form.

steril promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you,—this brave o'erhanging—this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours."

We can conceive this train of thought to be in harmony with the temper in which Shakspere must have regarded the public events of 1600. We may even believe that those events might have directed his mind to a more passionate and solemn and earnest exercise of its power than had previously been called forth. We may fancy such tragic scenes having their influence in rendering the great master of comedy, unrivalled amidst his contemporaries for the brilliancy of his wit and the genuineness of his humour, turn to other and loftier themes:—

> "I come no more to make you laugh; things now,
> That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
> Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
> Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow
> We now present." *

But the influence of time in the formation and direction of the poetical power must also be taken into account. Shakspere was now thirty-seven years of age He had attained to the consciousness of his own intellectual strength, and he had acquired by long practice the mastery of his own genius. He had already learnt to direct the stage to higher and nobler purposes than those of mere amusement. It might be carried farther into the teaching of the highest philosophy through the medium of the grandest poetry. The epoch which produced Othello, Lear, and Macbeth has been described as exhibiting the genius of Shakspere in full possession and habitual exercise of power, "at its very point of culmination."†

The year 1601 was also a year which brought to Shakspere a great domestic affliction. His father died on the 8th of September of that year. It is impossible not to feel that Shakspere's family arrangements, imperfectly as we know them, had especial reference to the comfort and honour of his parents. When he bought New Place in 1597, his occupations then demanding his presence in London through great part of the year, his wife and children, we may readily imagine, were under the same roof with his father and mother. They had sighed over the declining health of his little Hamnet,—they had watched over the growth of his Susanna and Judith. If restricted means had at any previous period assailed them, he had provided for the comforts of their advanced age. And now that father, the companion of his boyhood—he who had led him forth into the fields, and had taught him to look at nature with a practical eye—was gone. More materials for deep thought in the year 1601. The Register of Stratford thus attests the death of this earliest friend:—

* Prologue to Henry VIII.

† Coleridge.

[Edinburgh in the Seventeenth Century.]

CHAPTER VIII.

DID SHAKSPERE VISIT SCOTLAND.

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§ I.

The question which we set forth as a title to this chapter was first raised, in 1767, by William Guthrie, in his 'General History of Scotland;' "A.D. 1599 The King, to prove how thoroughly he was now emancipated from the tutelage of his clergy, desired Elizabeth to send him this year a company of English comedians. She complied, and James gave them a licence to act in his capital and in his court. I have great reason to think that the immortal Shakspere was of the number." Guthrie, a very loose and inaccurate compiler, gives no authority for his statement; but it is evidently founded upon the following passage in Archbishop Spottiswood's 'History of the Church of Scotland,' which the writer says was "penned at the command of King James the Sixth

who bid the author write the truth and spare not:"—"In the end of the year [1599] happened some new jars betwixt the King and the ministers of Edinburgh; because of a company of English comedians, whom the King had licensed to play within the burgh. The ministers, being offended with the liberty given them, did exclaim in their sermons against stage-players, their unruliness and immodest behaviour; and in their sessions made an act, prohibiting people to resort unto their plays, under pain of the church censures. The King, taking this to be a discharge of his licence, called the sessions before the council, and ordained them to annul their act, and not to restrain the people from going to these comedies; which they promised, and accordingly performed; whereof publication was made the day after, and all that pleased permitted to repair unto the same, to the great offence of the ministers." The assertion of Guthrie, that James "desired Elizabeth to send him this year a company of English comedians," rests upon no foundation; and his conjecture "that the immortal Shakspere was of the number" is equally baseless. The end of the year 1599, the period mentioned by Spottiswood, must be taken to mean somewhere about the month of December; for by an alteration of style, exactly at this period, the legal year in Scotland commenced on the 1st of January, 1600. We find, both from the Registers of the Privy Council,* and the Office Books of the Treasurers of the Chamber, that the Lord Chamberlain's servants performed before Queen Elizabeth on St. Stephen's Day at night, the 26th of December, 1599. This is decisive evidence that the company of English comedians, who were licensed by James to play at Edinburgh at the end of the year 1599, was not Shakspere's company.

But it has been conjectured that Shakspere visited Scotland at a much earlier period. In Sir John Sinclair's 'Statistical Account of Scotland,' there is a description of the parish of Perth, by the Rev. James Scott, in which, speaking of modern plays at Perth, the writer says, "It may afford what may be reckoned a curious piece of information to relate how plays were regulated in Perth more than two hundred years ago. It appears from the old records that a company of players were in Perth, June 3, 1589. In obedience to an act of the General Assembly, which had been made in the year 1574-5, they applied to the consistory of the church for a licence, and showed a copy of the play which they proposed to exhibit." The words of the record, some of them a little modernized, are, "Perth, June 3, 1589—The minister and elders give licence to play the play, with conditions that no swearing, banning, nor ane scurrility shall be spoken, which would be a scandal to our religion which we profess, and for an evil example unto others. Also that nothing shall be added to what is in the register of the play itself. If any one who plays shall do in the contrary, he shall be warded, and make his public repentance." Mr. Scott then alludes to Guthrie's statement, and says of Shakspere, "that actor and writer of plays most probably began his excursions before the year 1589. If, therefore, they were English actors who were at Perth that year, he might perhaps be one of them."

* See Chalmers's 'Apology,' p. 401.

The conjectures of Guthrie and of Scott are so manifestly loose and untenable that we can easily understand why they attracted no regard amongst the English writers on Shakspere. Sir John Sinclair, as stated by Drake, "when speaking of the local traditions respecting Macbeth's castle at Dunsinane, infers from their coincidence with the drama, that Shakspere, 'in his capacity of actor, travelled to Scotland in 1599, and collected on the spot materials for the exercise of his imagination.'"* Drake doubts the validity of the inference; and Stoddart holds that here "conjecture seems to have gone its full length, if not to have overstepped the modesty of nature."† Chalmers, although he notices at some length the state of the drama in Scotland previous to the accession of James to the English crown, has no mention of the opinion that Shakspere had visited Scotland. Malone gives the statement and the conjecture of Guthrie, adding, "If the writer had any ground for this assertion, why was it not stated? It is extremely improbable that Shakspeare should have left London at this period. In 1599 his King Henry V. was produced, and without doubt acted with great applause."‡ Mr. Collier, mentioning that "Towards the close of the year 1599 a company of English players arrived in Edinburgh," says in a note, "It has been supposed by some, that Shakespeare was a member of this company, and that he even took his description of Macbeth's castle from local observation. No evidence can be produced either way, excepting Malone's conjecture, that Shakespeare could not have left London in 1599, in consequence of the production of his Henry V. in that year."§ Mr. Collier does not notice a subsequent visit of a company of English players to Scotland, as detailed in a bulky local history published in London in 1818,—the 'Annals of Aberdeen,' by William Kennedy. This writer does not print the document upon which he founds his statement; but his narrative is so circumstantial as to leave little doubt that the company of players to which Shakspere belonged visited Aberdeen in 1601. The account of Mr. Kennedy has since been commented upon in a paper published in the Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries in Scotland in 1830 (to which we shall presently further allude); and in a most lively, instructive, and learned volume—a model of guide-books—'The Book of Bon Accord, or a Guide to the City of Aberdeen,' 1839.

Before we proceed to state the additional evidence which we have collected upon this question, we would briefly direct the attention of our readers to the bearings of the subject upon Shakspere's life, in connection with his writings. Macbeth is altogether one of the most remarkable of the plays of Shakspere, not only as displaying the highest power, but as presenting a story and a machinery altogether different in character from any other of his works. If it can be proved, or reasonably inferred, that this story was suggested, or its local details established, or the materials for the machinery collected, through the presence of the great poet upon Scottish ground, a new interest is created in Macbeth, not only for the people of Scotland, but for every one to whom Shak-

* 'Chronological Order,' Boswell's Edition, p. 41.
† 'Shakspeare and his Times,' vol. ii., p. 588.
‡ 'Remarks on Local Scenery, &c., in Scotland.
§ 'Annals of the Stage,' 1831, vol. i., p. 344.

spere is familiar. It is especially interesting as a literary question, from the circumstance that if we can trace Shakspere's accurate observation of the things which were around him, in recent events, in scenery, and in the manners of the people, during a brief visit to a country so essentially different in its physical features from his own—of which the people presented so many characteristics which he could not find in England—we may add one more to the proofs which we have all along sought to establish, that Shakspere was the most careful of observers, and the most diligent of workers; that his poetical power had a deep foundation of accuracy; that his judgment was as remarkable as his imagination. Inclining, therefore, to the belief that Shakspere did visit Scotland in 1601,—having the precise date of the visit of a company of players to Aberdeen in October, 1601,—we shall, in the first instance, go through the play of Macbeth with the impression that it may contain some peculiarities which were not wholly derived from books; which might have been more vividly impressed upon the mind of the poet by local associations; which become more clear and intelligible to ourselves when we understand what those associations especially were. We request our readers not to be incredulous at the onset of this examination. We may distinctly state that, as far as any public or private record informs us, there is no circumstance to show that the Lord Chamberlain's company was not in Scotland in the autumn of 1601. It is a curious fact that even three months later, at the Christmas of that year, there is no record that the Lord Chamberlain's company performed before Queen Elizabeth. The Office-Book of the Treasurer of the Chamber records no performance between Shrove Tuesday, the 3rd of March, 1601, and St. Stephen's Day, the 26th of December, 1602. There is a record, however, which shows that Shakspere's company was in London at the beginning of 1602. It is that note in the table-book of the student of the Middle Temple, which proves that Twelfth Night was performed at the feast of that society on the 2nd of February, 1602. If it can be shown that the company to which Shakspere belonged was performing in Scotland in October, 1601, there is every probability that Shakspere himself was not absent. He buried his father at Stratford on the 8th of September of that year. The summer season of the Globe would be ended; the winter season at the Blackfriars not begun. He had a large interest as a shareholder in his company; he is supposed to have been the owner of its properties or stage equipments. His duty would call him to Scotland. The journey and the sojourn there would present some relief to the gloomy thoughts which the events of 1601 must have cast upon him.

The commentators on Shakspere have taken some pains to assign to his tragedy of Macbeth a different origin than the narrative of Holinshed. That narrative was, of course, before the author of Macbeth. It was a striking narrative and, after the accession of James, the poet's attention might have been drawn to it by other circumstances than its capacity for the drama. Holinshed speaks of "Banquo the Thane of Lochabar, of whom the house of the Stuarts is descended, the which by order of lineage hath now for a long time enjoyed the crown of Scotland even till these our days." It is clear that Shakspere consulted Holinshed; for he has engrafted some of the circumstances related of the

murder of King Duff upon the story of Macbeth. But we still admit that the commentators might naturally look for some circumstance that should have impressed the history of the fortunes of Macbeth and Banquo more forcibly upon the imagination of Shakspere than the narrative of Holinshed. It was not the custom of the poet to adopt any story that was not in some degree familiar to his audience, either in their chroniclers, their elder dramatists, or in their novelists. Here was a story quite out of the range of the ordinary reading even of educated Englishmen. The wild romance of Scottish history had not as yet been popularized and elevated into poetry. The field was altogether untrodden. The memory of the patriot heroes of Scotland would not be acceptable to those who desired to see revived upon the stage their own "forefathers' valiant acts that had been long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books."* 'The Scottish History of James IV. slain at Flodden,' of Robert Greene, is altogether a romance, the materials for which can be traced in no Scottish history or tradition. The fable of that wild play has no reference to the death of James IV. at Flodden. It was the knowledge of these facts which probably led Dr. Farmer to the following notion of the origin of Macbeth: "Macbeth was certainly one of Shakspeare's latest productions, and it might possibly have been suggested to him by a little performance on the same subject at Oxford, before King James, 1605."† Dr. Farmer acquired his knowledge of this performance from a description in Wake's 'Rex Platonicus,' 1607, from which it appears that three young men, habited as sibyls, came forth from St. John's College, singing alternate verses, in which they professed themselves to be the three Sibyls who, according to the ancient history of Scotland, appeared to Macbeth and Banquo, predicting that one should be king, but should have no kingly issue, and that the other should not be king, but should be the father of many kings.'‡ The actual verses of the little performance were subsequently found annexed to the 'Vertumnus' of Dr. Gwynne, 1607. The whole interlude, as it is called, consists of twenty-nine lines, six of which only have any reference to Banquo, and none whatever to Macbeth. We must seek farther for the origin of Shakspere's Macbeth. A. Nixon, in his 'Oxford Triumphs,' 1605, says "The King did very much applaud the conceit of three little boys dressed like three nymphs." This is very limited applause. "Hearing of this favourable reception," says Chalmers, "Shakspeare determined to write his tragedy, knowing that he could readily find materials in Holinshed's Chronicle, his common magazine." If we believe that the materials of Holinshed were not sufficiently suggestive to the poet,—if we think that local associations might probably have first carried Shakspere to the story of Macbeth, more strikingly than a romantic narrative, mixed up with other legends as strongly seizing upon the imagination,—we may find upon Scottish ground some memories of an event which could not itself be safely dramatized (although even that was subsequently shown upon the stage), but which might have originated that train of thought which was finally to shape itself into the dramatic history of King Duncan's murder, under the influence of "fate and metaphysical aid."

* Nashe. † 'Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare.'

‡ The Latin quotations from Wake may be consulted in Boswell's Malone, vol. xi., pp. 280, 281.

If Shakspere visited Perth in the autumn of 1601, he was in that city within fourteen months of the period when one of the most extraordinary tragedies in the tragic history of Scotland had been acted within its walls. With the details of this real tragedy Shakspere might have been familiar without a visit to Perth; for 'The Earle of Gowrie's Conspiracie against the Kingis Maiestie of Scotland, at Saint Johnstoun,* vpon Tuesday the fift of August, 1600,' was printed at London by Valentine Simmes (the printer of several of Shakspere's quarto plays) in the same year that the conspiracy took place. Whatever might have been the insinuations of the Presbyterian divines in Scotland, this authorized account could not have presented itself to an unprejudiced English mind except as a circumstantial, consistent, and true relation. The judicial evidence which has been collected and published in recent times sustains this narrative in all essential particulars. Place the poet in the High Gate [High Street] of Perth, looking upon the Castle of Gowrie; let the window be pointed out to him from which the King cried out "I am murdered;" let him enter the "Blak Turnpike," the secret stair which led to the "gallery chalmer" from which the cries proceeded;—let him, surrounded with the courtiers of James, listen to the details of terror which would be crowded into the description of such an event; and Scottish history might then be searched for some parallel of a king murdered by an ambitious subject. Let us see if there are any details in the 'Discourse of the vnnaturall and vile Conspiracie attempted against his Maiesties person, at Saint Johnstoun, upon the fift day of August, being Tuesday, 1600,' or in the judicial evidence before the court held in Perth on the 22nd of August of that year, or in the previous examinations at the King's Palace at Falkland,† which have any resemblance to the incidents in the tragedy of Macbeth.

John Earl of Gowrie, and his brother Alexander, the Master of Ruthven, were two young noblemen of great popularity. They had travelled; they were accomplished in many branches of knowledge. Amongst the attempts to blacken the character of the unhappy Earl it was desired to be shown that he practised sorceries, and that he conversed with sorcerers. James Weimis, of Bogy, recounts the Earl's conversations with him upon mysterious subjects;—of serpents which could be made to stand still upon pronouncing a Hebrew word; of a necromancer in Italy with whom he had dealings; of a man whose hanging he predicted, and he was hanged; "and that this deponent counselled the Earl to beware with whom he did communicate such speeches, who answered that he would communicate them to none except great scholars." Master William Reid deposed to certain magical characters found in his lord's pocket after his death; that he always kept the characters about him; and that in his opinion it was for no good. Thus, then, we encounter at the onset something like the belief of Macbeth in matters beyond human reason. "I have learned by the perfectest report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge."‡ According

* Saint Johnstoun was another name for Perth.

† See Pitcairn's 'Criminal Trials,' vol. ii., p. 146 to p. 332.

‡ A Latin treatise was published at Edinburgh, in 1601, 'De execrabili et nefanda fratrvm Rvvenorvm in serenissimi Scotorum Regis caput Conjuratione,' which learnedly dwells upon the

to the narrative of the Gowrie Conspiracy, Alexander Ruthven met the King as he was going out of his palace at Falkland, and earnestly solicited him to go to Perth, to examine a man who had discovered a treasure. The King reluctantly consented, but at last did consent. Ruthven then directed "Andrew Henderson, Chamberlain to the said Earl, to ride in all haste to the Earl, commanding him that he should not spare for spilling of his horse, and that he should advertise the Earl that he hoped to move his Majesty to come thither." Compare this with the fifth scene of Macbeth :—

> "*Attendant.* The King comes here to-night.
> *Lady Macbeth.* Thou 'rt mad to say it :
> Is not thy master with him? who, wer 't so,
> Would have inform'd for preparation.
> *Atten.* So please you, it is true ; our thane is coming ;
> One of my fellows had the speed of him ;
> Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
> Than would make up his message.
> *Lady M.* Give him tending,
> He brings great news."

Macbeth precedes Duncan. Alexander Ruthven goes before James. The Duke of Lennox says, "After that Master Alexander had come a certain space with his Highness, he rode away and galloped to Perth before the rest of the company towards his brother's lodgings, of purpose, as the deponent believes, to advertise the Earl of Gowrie of his Majesty's coming there." So Macbeth : "Duncan comes here to-night." When Macbeth receives the prophecy of the weird sisters he is so absorbed with

> "That suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature,"

that Banquo exclaims

> "Look, how our partner's rapt!"

King James thought Alexander Ruthven "somewhat beside himself," and noticed "his raised and uncouth staring and continued pensiveness." The description of the banquet with which Gowrie receives the King,—sorry cheer,

charge against Gowrie of tampering with supernatural aid, and which in one passage bears a still more remarkable resemblance to the original promptings of Macbeth's ambition :—"Quis est enim in noscitandis adolescentum nostri ævi ingenijs adeo peregrinus, qui non continuo subodoretur Govvrium hæreditaria ea scabie pravæ curiositatis prurientem, atque in patris ac avi mores institutaque euntem, consuluisse Magum hunc, quæ sors maneret eum, aut quo fato esset periturus : et veteratoris spiritus astu (ita vt fit) *ambigua aliqua responsione* fucum illi factum." This is the very sentiment of Macbeth :—

> "And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
> That palter with us in a double sense ;
> That keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope."

according to his Majesty, excused upon the suddenness of his coming—is very remarkable: "His Majesty being set down to his dinner, the said Earl stood very pensive, and with a dejected countenance, at the end of his Majesty's table, oft rounding [whispering] over his shoulder, one while to one of his servants, and another while to another; and oft-times went out and in to the chamber." Very similar to this is the situation expressed by the original stage direction in Macbeth: "Enter a Sewer, and divers servants with dishes and service over the stage. Then enter Macbeth." We can imagine Gowrie, on one of the occasions when he went out and in to the chamber, thinking the very thoughts which Macbeth thinks aloud when he has left the King:—

> "If it were done, when 't is done, then 't were well
> It were done quickly."

We can fancy the Master of Ruthven seeking his brother, (the favourite of the people of Perth,) as Lady Macbeth sought her husband:—

> "*Lady M.* He has almost supp'd: Why have you left the chamber?
> *Macb.* Ha'h he ask'd for me?
> *Lady M.* Know you not he has?
> *Macb.* We will proceed no further in this business:
> He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
> *Golden opinions from all sorts of people.*"

King James is led by Master Alexander "up a turnpike, and through two or three chambers, the said Master Alexander ever locking behind him every door as he passed." Then comes the attempt at assassination. The circumstances in Macbeth are of course essentially different; but the ambition which prompted the murder of Duncan, and the attempt upon James, are identical. The King is held to have said while he was in the death grip of the Master of Ruthven, "Albeit ye bereave me of my life, ye will nought be King of Scotland, for I have both sons and daughters." So

> "We will establish our estate upon
> Our eldest Malcolm."

It is a singular characteristic of the Gowrie tragedy that the chief conspirators, the Earl of Gowrie and the Master of Ruthven, were put to death in so sudden a way that the real circumstances of the case must always be involved in some doubt. The evidence is not wholly satisfactory. The Duke of Lennox, who was the chief witness of credit, says of himself, the Earl of Mar, and their company, that "Notwithstanding long forcing with hammers, they got nought entry at the said chamber until after the Earl of Gowrie and his brother were both slain. . . . . And at their first entry they saw the Earl of Gowrie lying dead in the chamber, Master Alexander Ruthven being slain and taken down the stair before their entry." The official account says that Sir John Ramsey, finding the turnpike-door open (not the regular entrance, but one that led direct from the street), entered the chamber where the King and the Master were struggling. He struck the traitor with his dagger, "who was no sooner shot out at the door but he was met by Sir Thomas Erskine and Sir Hugh

[Perth, and Vicinity.]

Herries, who there upon the stair ended him." The Earl of Gowrie followed these servants of the King; and then the Earl was "stricken dead with a stroke through the heart which the said Sir John Ramsey gave him." Sir Thomas Erskine and Sir John Ramsey confirm this account. The people of Perth believed that the Earl of Gowrie, their Provost, was unjustly slain; and their cry was, "Bloody butchers, traitors, murderers, ye shall all die! give us forth our Provost! Woe worth ye greencoats, woe worth this day for ever! Traitors and thieves that have slain the Earl of Gowrie!" The slaying of the two brothers gave rise to the belief that "the King was a doer, and not a sufferer." * It was this belief that moved the people of Perth to utter "most irreverent and undutiful speeches against his Majesty," even though the Earl was denounced as "a studier of magic, and a conjurer of devils." Macbeth has furnished the excuse for such a sudden slaying of the brothers:—

> "*Macbeth.* O, yet I do repent me of my fury,
> That I did kill them.
> *Macduff.* Wherefore did you so?
> *Macb.* Who can be wise, amaz'd, temperate, and furious,
> Loyal, and neutral, in a moment? No man:
> The expedition of my violent love
> Outran the pauser reason."

The people of Perth, however, became reconciled to James. On the 15th of April, 1601, "The King's Majesty came to Perth, and was made burgess at the

* Galloway's Discourse before the King.

Market Cross. There was eight puncheons of wine set there, and all drunken out. He received the banquet at the town, and subscribed the guild-book with his own hand, 'Jacobus Rex, parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos.'"

In a paper read to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, by John Anderson, Esq., 'On the Site of Macbeth's Castle at Inverness,'* the author says, "The extreme accuracy with which Shakspere has followed the minutiæ of Macbeth's career has given rise to the opinion that he himself visited those scenes which are immortalized by his pen." It is our duty to examine this opinion somewhat particularly, whatever be the conclusions to which the examination may conduct us.

The story of Macbeth was presented to Shakspere in a sufficiently complete form by the chronicler from whom he derived so many other materials, Holinshed. In testing, therefore, "the extreme accuracy with which Shakspere has followed the minutiæ of Macbeth's career"—by which we understand the writer to mean the accuracy of the poet in details of locality—we must inquire how far he agrees with, or differs from, and how far he expands, or curtails, the local statements or allusions of his chief authority. In the tragedy, Macbeth and Banquo, returning from their victory, are proceeding to Forres: "How far is't called to Forres?" In the chronicler we find, "It fortuned as Macbeth and Banquo journeyed towards Forres, where the king then lay." So far there is agreement as to the scene. The historian thus proceeds: "They went sporting by the way together without other company, passing thorough the woods and fields, when suddenly, in the middest of a laund, there met them three women in strange and wild apparel." This description presents to us the idea of a pleasant and fertile place. The very spot where the supernatural soliciting occurs is a laund, or meadow amongst trees.† The poet chose his scene with greater art. The witches meet "*upon the heath;*" they stop the way of Macbeth and Banquo upon the "*blasted heath.*" But the poet was also more accurate than the historian in his traditionary topography. The country around Forres is wild moorland. Boswell, passing from Elgin to Forres in company with Johnson, says, "In the afternoon we drove over the very heath where Macbeth met the witches, according to tradition. Dr. Johnson again solemnly repeated, 'How far is't called to Forres?' &c." But, opposed to this, the more general tradition holds that the "blasted heath" was on the east of Forres, between that town and Nairn. "A more dreary piece of moorland is not to be found in all Scotland. . . . . There is something startling to a stranger in seeing the solitary figure of the peat-digger or rush-gatherer moving amidst the waste in the sunshine of a calm autumn day; but the desolation of the scene in stormy weather, or when the twilight fogs are trailing over the pathless heath, or settling down upon the pools, must be indescribable."‡ We thus see that, whether Macbeth met the weird sisters to the east or west of Forres, there was in each place that desolation which was best fitted for such an event, and not

* 'Transactions,' vol. iii., 28th January, 1828.

† A laund is described by Camden as "a plain amongst trees."

‡ Local Illustrations of Macbeth, Act I.

the woods and fields and launds of the chronicler. From Forres, where Macbeth proffers his service and his loyalty to his king, was a day's ride to his own castle: "From hence to Inverness." Boece makes Inverness the scene of Duncan's murder. Holinshed merely says, "He slew the king at Enverns, or (as some say) at Botgosvane." The chroniclers would have furnished Shakspere no notion of the particular character of the castle at Inverness. Without some local knowledge the poet might have placed it upon a frowning rock, lonely, inaccessible, surrounded with a gloom and grandeur fitted for deeds of murder and usurpation. He has chosen altogether a different scene:—

> "*Dun.* This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.
> *Ban.* This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle:
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd,
> The air is delicate."

Such a description, contrasting as it does with the deeds of terror that are to be acted in that pleasant seat, is unquestionably an effort of the highest art. But here again the art appears founded upon a reality. Mr. Anderson, in the paper which we have already quoted, has shown from various records that there was an old castle at Inverness. It was not the castle whose ruins Johnson visited and of which Boswell says, "It perfectly corresponds with Shakspeare's description;" but a castle on an adjacent eminence called the Crown—so called from having been a royal seat. Traditionary lore, Mr. Anderson says, embodies this opinion, connecting the place with the history of Macbeth. "Immediately opposite to the Crown, on a similar eminence, and separated from it by a small valley, is a farm belonging to a gentleman of the name of Welsh. That part of the ascent to this farm next Viewfield, from the Great Highland Road, is called 'Banquo's Brae.' The whole of the vicinity is rich in wild imagery. From the mouth of the valley of Diriebught to King's Mills, thence by the road to Viewfield, and down the gorge of Aultmuniack to the mail-road along the sea-shore, we compass a district celebrated in the annals of *diablerie*." The writer then goes on to mention other circumstances corroborating his opinion as to the site of Macbeth's castle: "Traces of what has been an approach to a place of consequence are still discernible. This approach enters the lands of Diriebught from the present mail-road from Fort George; and, running through the valley, gradually ascends the bank of the Crown Hill; and, the level attained, strikes again towards the eastern point, where it terminates. Here the 'pleasant seat' is rumoured to have stood, facing the sea; and singularly correct with respect to the relative points of the compass will be found the poet's disposal of the portal 'at the south entry.'"

The investiture of Macbeth at Scone, and the burial of Duncan at Colmeskill, are facts derived by the poet from the chronicler. Hence also Shakspere derived

the legend, of which he made so glorious a use, that "a certain witch whom he had in great trust had told Macbeth that he should never be slain with man born of any woman, nor vanquished till the wood of Birnane came to the castle of Dunsinane." From Holinshed, also, he acquired a general notion of the situation of this castle: "He builded a strong castle on the top of an high hill called Dunsinane, situate in Gowrie, ten miles from Perth, on such a proud height that standing there aloft a man might behold well near all the countries of Angus, Fife, Stirmond, and Erndale, as it were lying underneath him." The propinquity of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane is indicated only in the chronicler by the circumstance that Malcolm rested there the night before the battle, and on the morrow marched to Dunsinane, every man "bearing a bough of some tree or other of that wood in his hand." The commanding position of Dunsinane, as described by the chronicler, is strictly adhered to by the poet:—

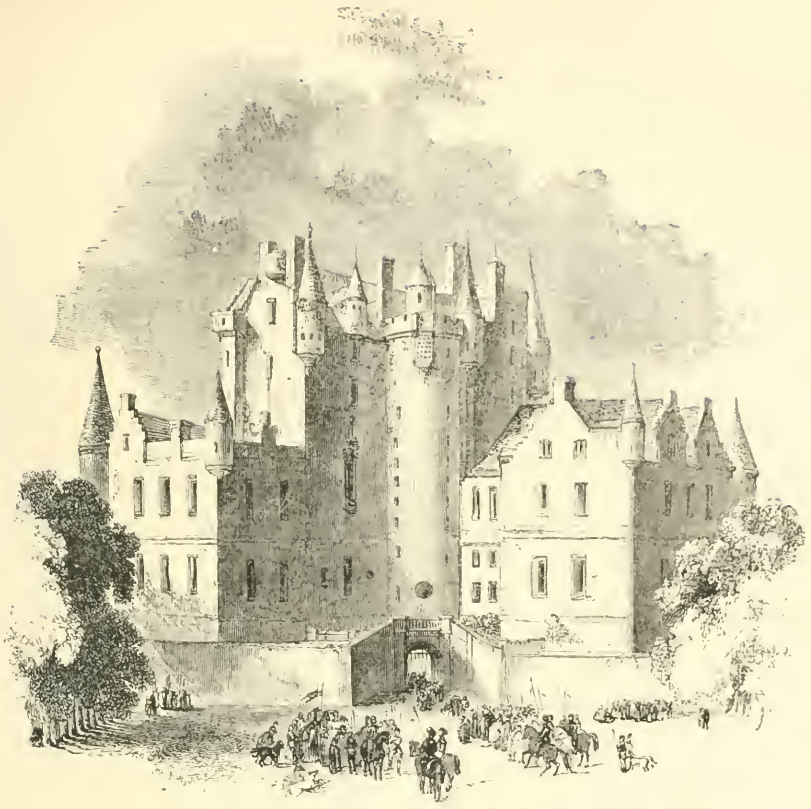
> "As I did stand my watch upon the hill
> I looked toward Birnam, and anon, methought
> The wood began to move."

But the poet has a particularity which the historian has not:—

> "Within this three mile may you see it coming;
> I say, a moving grove."

This minuteness sounds like individual local knowledge. The Dunsinane Hills form a long range extending in a north-easterly direction from Perth to Glamis. The castle of the "thane of Glamis" has been made a traditionary scene of the murder of Duncan. Birnam Hill is to the north-west of Perth; and between the two elevations there is a distance of some twelve miles, formed by the valley

[Dunsinane.]



[Glamis Castle.]

of the Tay. But Birnam Hill and Birnam Wood might have been essentially different spots two centuries and a half ago. The plain is now under tillage; but even in the time of Shakspere it might have been for the most part woodland, extending from Birnam Hill within four or five miles of Dunsinane; distinguished from Birnam Hill as Birnam Wood. At the distance of three miles it was "a moving grove." It was still nigher to Dunsinane when Malcolm exclaimed,

"Now, near enough, your leafy screens throw down."

These passages in the play might have been written without any local knowledge, but they certainly do not exhibit any local ignorance. It has been said, "The probability of Shakspeare's ever having been in Scotland is very remote. It should seem, by his uniformly accenting the name of this spot Dunsinane, that he could not possibly have taken it from the mouths of the country-people, who as uniformly accent it Dunsínnan." * This is not quite accurate, as Dr Drake has pointed out. Shakspere has this passage:—

"Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him."

* Stoddart's 'Remarks on the Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland,' 1801.

Wintoun, in his 'Chronicle,' has both Dunsinane and Dunsínane. But we are informed by a gentleman who is devoted to the study of Scotch antiquities that there is every reason to believe that Dunsinane was the ancient pronunciation, and that Shakspere was consequently right in making Dunsínane the exception to his ordinary method of accenting the word. So much for the topographical knowledge displayed in 'Macbeth.' Alone, it is scarcely enough to found an argument upon.

But there is a point of specific knowledge in this tragedy which opens out a wider field of inquiry. Coleridge has said—"The Weird Sisters are as true a creation of Shakspeare's, as his Ariel and Caliban,—fates, furies, and materializing witches being the elements. They are wholly different from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers, and yet presented a sufficient external resemblance to the creatures of vulgar prejudice to act immediately on the audience." Fully acknowledging that the weird sisters are a creation—for all the creations of poetry to be effective must still be akin to something which has been acted or believed by man, and therefore true in the highest sense of the word—we have still to inquire whether there were in existence any common materials for this poetical creation. We have no doubt that the witches of 'Macbeth' "are wholly different from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers." Charles Lamb says of the 'Witch of Edmonton,' a tragi-comedy by Rowley, Dekker, and Ford, that Mother Sawyer "is the plain traditional old woman witch of our ancestors; poor, deformed, and ignorant; the terror of villages, herself amenable to a justice." She has "a familiar which serves her in the likeness of a black dog." It is he who strikes the horse lame, and nips the sucking child, and forbids the butter to come that has been churning nine hours. It is scarcely necessary to inquire whether the 'Witch' of Middleton preceded the 'Macbeth' of Shakspere. Davenant engrafted Middleton's Lyrics upon the stage 'Macbeth;' but those who sing Locke's music are not the witches of Shakspere. Middleton's witches are essentially unpoetical, except in a passage or two of these Lyrics. Hecate, their queen, has all the low revenges and prosaic occupations of the meanest of the tribe. Take an example:—

"*Hec.* Is the heart of wax
Stuck full of magic needles?
Stadlin 'T is done, Hecate.
Hec. And is the farmer's picture, and his wife's,
Laid down to th' fire yet?
Stad. They are a roasting both, too.
Hec. Good;
Then their marrows are a melting subtlely,
And three months' sickness sucks up life in 'em.
They deny'd me often flour, barm, and milk,
Goose-grease and tar, when I ne'er hurt their churnings,
Their brew-locks, nor their batches, nor fore-spoke
Any of their breedings. Now I 'll be meet with 'em.
Seven of their young pigs I have bewitch'd already
Of the last litter; nine ducklings, thirteen goslings, and a hog
Fell lame last Sunday after even-song too.

And mark how their sheep prosper; or what soup
Each milch-kine gives to th pail: I'll send these snakes
Shall milk 'em all beforehand: the dew'd-skirted dairy wenches
Shall stroke dry dugs for this, and go home cursing:
I'll mar their syllabubs, and swathy feastings
Under cows' bellies, with the parish youths."

Maudlin, the witch of Ben Jonson's 'Sad Shepherd,' is scarcely more elevated. He has indeed, thrown some poetry over her abiding place — conventional poetry, but sonorous :—

"Within a gloomy dimble she doth dwell,
Down in a pit o'ergrown with brakes and briars,
Close by the ruins of a shaken abbey,
Torn with an earthquake down unto the ground,
'Mongst graves and grots, near an old charnel-house."

But her pursuits scarcely required so solemn a scene for her incantations. Her business was

"To make ewes cast their lambs, swine eat their farrow,
The housewives' tun not work, nor the milk churn;
Writhe children's wrists, and suck their breath in sleep,
Get vials of their blood; and where the sea
Casts up his slimy ooze, search for a weed
To open locks with, and to rivet charms,
Planted about her in the wicked feat
Of all her mischiefs, which are manifold."

For these ignoble purposes she employs all the spells of classical antiquity; but she is nevertheless nothing more than the traditional English witch who sits in her form in the shape of a hare :—

"I'll lay
My hand upon her, make her throw her skut
Along her back, when she doth start before us.
But you must give her law: and you shall see her
Make twenty leaps and doubles; cross the paths,
And then squat down beside us."

The peculiar elevation of the weird sisters, as compared with these representations of a vulgar superstition, may be partly ascribed to the higher character of the scenes in which they are introduced, and partly to the loftier powers of the poet who introduces them. But we think it may be also shown, in a great degree, that some of their peculiar attributes belong to the superstitions of Scotland rather than to those of England; and, if so, we may next inquire how the poet became familiarly acquainted with those superstitions.

The first legislative enactment against witchcraft in England was in the 33rd of Henry VIII. This bill is a singular mixture of unbelief and credulity. The preamble recites, that "Where [whereas] divers and sundry persons unlawfully have devised and practised invocations and conjurations of spirits, pretending by such means to understand and get knowledge for their own lucre in what

place treasure of gold and silver should or might be found or had in the earth or other secret places, and also have used and occupied witchcrafts, enchantments, and sorceries, to the destruction of their neighbours' persons and goods." Thus the witches have pretended to get knowledge of treasure, but they have used enchantments to the injury of their neighbours. The enactment makes it felony to use or cause to be used "any invocations or conjurations of spirits, witchcrafts, enchantments, or sorceries, to the *intent* to get or find money or treasure, or to waste, consume, or destroy any person in his body, members, or goods." So little was the offence regarded in England, or the protection of the law desired, that this statute was repealed amongst other new felonies in the first year of Edward VI., 1547. The Act of the 5th of Elizabeth, 1562-3, exhibits a considerable progress in the belief in witchcraft. It recites that since the repeal of the statute of Henry VIII., "Many fantastical and devilish persons have devised and practised invocations and conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, and have used and practised witchcrafts, enchantments, charms, and sorceries, to the destruction of the persons and goods of their neighbours, and other subjects of this realm." The enactment makes a subtle distinction between those who "use, practise, or exercise any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits to or for any intent or purpose," and those who "use any witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed." The conjuration of spirits, for any intent, was a capital crime: plain witchcraft was only capital when a person was through it killed or destroyed. It would seem, therefore, that witchcraft might exist without the higher crime of the conjuration of evil spirits. By this enactment the witchcraft which destroyed life was punishable by death; but the witchcraft which only wasted, consumed, or lamed the body or member, or destroyed or impaired the goods of any person, was punishable only with imprisonment and the pillory for the first offence. The treasure-finders were dealt with even more leniently. The climax of our witch legislation was the Act of the 1st of James I., 1603-4. This statute deals with the offence with a minute knowledge of its atrocities which the learning of England had not yet attained to. The King brought this lore from his own land: "And for the better restraining the said offences, and more severe punishing the same, be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person or persons, after the said Feast of Saint Michael the Archangel next coming, shall use, practise, or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose, or take up any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment; or shall use, practise, or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery, whereby any person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined, or lamed in his or her body, or any part thereof; that then every such offender or offenders, their aiders, abettors, and counsellors, being of any the said offences duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons

and shall lose the privilege and benefit of clergy and sanctuary.' It is a remarkable proof of the little hold which the belief in witchcraft had obtained in England, that the legislation against the crime appears to have done very little for the production of the crime. "In one hundred and three years from the statute against witchcraft, in the 33rd of Henry VIII. till 1644, when we were in the midst of our civil wars, I find but about sixteen executed."* The popular fury against witchcraft in England belongs to a later period, which we call enlightened; when even such a judge as Hale could condemn two women to the flames, and Sir Thomas Browne, upon the same occasion, could testify his opinion that "the subtlety of the devil was co-operating with the malice of these which we term witches." It was in 1597 that James VI. of Scotland [James I.] published his 'Dæmonology,' written "against the damnable opinions of two principally, in our age, whereof the one called Scott, an English man, is not ashamed, in public print, to deny that there can be such a thing as witchcraft." The opinions of the King gave an impulse, no doubt, to the superstitions of the people, and to the frightful persecutions to which those superstitions led. But the popular belief assumed such an undoubting form, and displayed itself in so many shapes of wild imagination, that we may readily believe that the legal atrocities were as much a consequence of the delusion as that they fostered and upheld it. If Shakspere were in Scotland about this period, he would find ample materials upon which to found his creation of the weird sisters,—materials which England could not furnish him, and which it did not furnish to his contemporaries.

On the 2nd of February, 1596, a commission was issued by the King of Scotland "in favour of the Provost and Baillies of the burgh of Aberdeen, for the trial of Janet Wishart and others accused of witchcraft." Other commissions were obtained in 1596 and 1597, and during the space of one year no less than twenty-three women and one man were burned in Aberdeen, upon conviction of this crime, in addition to others who were banished and otherwise punished. Many of the proceedings on this extraordinary occasion were recently discovered in an apartment in the Town House of that city, and they were published in 1841 in the first volume of 'The Miscellany of the Spalding Club,'—a Society established "For the printing of the historical, ecclesiastical, genealogical, topographical, and literary remains of the north-eastern counties of Scotland." These papers occupy more than a hundred closely-printed quarto pages; and very truly does the editor of the volume say, "There is a greater variety of positive incident, and more imagination, displayed in these trials than are generally to be met with in similar records. . . . . They reflect a very distinct light on many obsolete customs, and on the popular belief of our ancestors." We opened these most curious documents with the hope of finding something that might illustrate, however inadequately, the wonderful display of fancy in the witches of Shakspere—that extraordinary union of a popular belief and a poetical creation which no other poet has in the slightest degree approached. We have not been disappointed. The documents embody the

* 'An Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft,' by Francis Hutchinson, D.D., 1720.

superstitions of the people within four years of the period when Shakspere is supposed to have visited Scotland; and when the company of which he was one of the most important members is held to have played at Aberdeen. The popular belief, through which twenty-four victims perished in 1597, would not have died out in 1601. Had Shakspere spent a few weeks in that city, it must have encountered him on every side, amidst the wealthy and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the clergy and the laity. All appear to have concurred in the unshaken confidence that they were acting rightly in the allegation and the credence of the most extraordinary instances of supernatural power. It was unnecessary that Shakspere should have heard the trials or read the documents which are now open to us, if he had dwelt for a short time amongst the people who were judges and witnesses. The popular excitement did not subside for many years. To the philosophical poet the common delusion would furnish ample materials for wonder and for use.

'Graymalkin' the cat, and 'Paddock' the toad, belong to the witch superstitions of the south as well as the north. The witches of the extreme north, the Laplanders and Finlanders, could bestow favourable winds. Reginald Scott, with his calm and benevolent irony, says, "No one endued with common sense but will deny that the elements are obedient to witches and at their commandment, or that they may, at their pleasure, send rain, hail, tempests, thunder, lightning, when she, being but an old doting woman, casteth a flint stone over her left shoulder towards the west." Shakspere in Macbeth dwells upon this superstition:—

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair,"

say the witches in the first scene. The second and third sisters will each give their revengeful sister "a wind:"—

"I myself have all the other;
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' the shipman's card."

Macbeth and Banquo, before they meet the sisters, have not seen "so foul and fair a day." Macbeth, in the incantation scene, invokes them with,

"Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the churches."

In the 'Dittay against Issobell Oige' at Aberdeen she is thus addressed:—"Thou art indicted and accused of practising of thy witchcraft in laying of the wind, and making of it to become calm and lowdin [smooth], a special point teached to thee by thy master Satan."* In those humble practices of the witches in Macbeth which assimilate them to common witches, such as "killing swine" in the third scene of the first act, Shakspere would scarcely need the ample authority which is furnished by charge upon charge in the

* In these quotations we shall take the freedom to change the Scottish orthography into English, to save unnecessary difficulty to our readers.

trials at Aberdeen. But even amongst these there is one incident so peculiar that we can scarcely believe that the poet could have conceived it amongst the woods and fields of his own mid-England :—

"A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
And mounch'd, and mounch'd, and mounch'd :—'Give me,' quoth I :
'Aroint thee, witch !' the rump-fed ronyon cries.
'Her husband 's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger :
But in a sieve I 'll thither sail,
And like a rat without a tail,
I 'll do, I 'll do, I 'll do.'"

One of the images here employed certainly came from Scotland. The witches who were evidence against Dr. Fian, the notable sorcerer who was burnt at Edinburgh in 1591, in their discovery 'how they pretended to bewitch and drown his Majesty in the sea coming from Denmark," testified "that all they together went to sea, each one in a riddle or *siere*." The revengeful witch goes on to say,

"Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-toss'd."

In the indictment against Violet Leys, she is told that "Alexander Lasoun thy husband, being one long time mariner in William Finlay's ship, was put forth of the same three years since. Thou and thy umquhile mother together bewitched the said William's ship, that since thy husband was put forth of the same she never made one good voyage ; but either the master or merchants at some times through tempest of weather were forced to cast overboard the greatest part of their lading, or then to perish, men, ship, and gear." This is a veritable sea-port superstition ; and it is remarkable that nearly all the dialogue of the witches before "Macbeth doth come," is occupied with it. Such delusions must have been rife at Aberdeen at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the witch superstitions of England, whether recorded in legislative enactments, in grave treatises, or in dramatic poetry, we find nothing of witchcraft in connexion with maritime affairs.

We have seen that in the enactment of Henry VIII., the superstitious belief that the power of witchcraft could waste the body was especially regarded. Shakspere need not, therefore, have gone farther for,

"Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid ;
He shall live a man forbid :
Weary sev'n nights nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine."

But the extent to which this belief was carried in Aberdeen, in 1596-7, is almost beyond credence. There was no doubt a contagious distemper ravaging the city and neighbourhood ; for nearly all the witches are accused of having produced the same effects upon their victims—"The one half day rossin [roasting] as in a fiery furnace, with an extraordinary kind of drought that she could not be slockit [slaked], and the other half day in an extraordinary kind of sweat-

ing, melting and consuming her body as a white burning candle, which kind of sickness is a special point of witchcraft." Still this is not essentially a superstition of the north. Bishop Jewell, preaching before the Queen previous to the revived statute against witchcraft, says, "Your grace's subjects pine away even unto the death. Their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their sense is bereft." But there is a superstition alluded to in Macbeth which we do not find in the south. Banquo addresses the weird sisters,—

> "If you can look into the seeds of time,
> And say, which grain will grow, and which will not,
> Speak then to me."

This may be metaphorical, but the metaphor is identical with an Aberdeen delusion. In the accusation against Johnnet Wischert there is this item,— "Indicted for passing to the green growing corn in May, twenty-two years since or thereby, sitting thereupon tymous in the morning before the sun-rising, and being there found and demanded what she was doing, thou answered, I shall tell thee, I have been piling [peeling] the blades of the corn, I find it will be one dear year, the blade of the corn grows withersones [contrary to the course of the sun], and when it grows sonegatis about [with the course of the sun] it will be good cheap year."

The witches' dance can scarcely be distinctly found in any superstition of the south. In Macbeth the first witch says,—

> "I'll charm the air to give a sound
> While you perform your antique round."

The Aberdeen trials abound with charges against those who partook in such fearful merriment. They danced early in the morning upon St. Catherine's Hill; they danced at twelve-hours at even round the Fish Cross of the borough. The devil, their master, was with them, playing on his form of instruments. Marion Grant is thus accused: "Thou confessed that the devil thy master, whom thou termest Christsonday, caused thee dance sundry times with him, and with Our Lady, who, as thou sayest, was a fine woman, clad in a white walicot, and sundry others of Christsonday's servants with thee whose names thou knowest not, and that the devil played on his form of instruments very pleasantly unto you."* Here is something like the poetry of witchcraft opening upon us. Here are dances something approaching to those of Hecate,

> "Like elves and fairies in a ring."

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* The reader cannot fail to observe that this article of the witch-belief lingered in Scotland until the period when Burns preserved it for all time in 'Tam o' Shanter:'—

> "Warlocks and witches in a dance:
> Nae cotillon brent new frae France,
> But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
> Put life and mettle in their heels.
> A winnock-bunker in the east,
> There sat auld Nick in shape o' beast; A towzie

Here is what the editor of the 'Witchcraft Trials' so justly calls a display of "imagination." What if we here should find the very character of Hecate herself,—something higher than the Dame Hecate of Ben Jonson,—more definite in her attributes than the Hecate of the mythology? Andro Man is thus indicted:—"Thou art accused as a most notorious witch and sorcerer, in so far as thou confessest and affirmest thyself that by the space of threescore years since or thereby the devil thy master came to thy mother's house in the likeness and shape of a woman, whom thou callest the Queen of Elphen." The Queen of Elphen, with others, rode upon white hackneys. She and her company have shapes and clothes like men, and yet they are but shadows, but are starker [stronger] than men; "and they have playing and dancing when they please, and also that the Queen is very pleasant, and will be old and young when she pleases." The force of imagination can scarcely go farther than in one of the confessions of this poor old man:—"Thou affirmest that the Queen of Elphen has a grip of all the craft, but Christsonday is the good man, and has all power under God, and that thou kennest sundry dead men in their company, and that the king who died in Flodden and Thomas Rymour is there." There is here almost imagination enough to have suggested the scene of that vision of the dead of which Macbeth exclaimed,

> "Now I see 't is true:
> For the blood-bolter'd Banquo smiles upon me."

When Johnson produced the 'Masque of Queens' at Whitehall, in 1609, he did not hesitate to allude to the opinions of James as an authority for some of the imagery of his witch-scenes. In his note upon the goat which the witch Dame was to ride, he says—"His Majesty also remembers the story of the devil's appearance to those of Calicut, in that form, Dæmonol. lib. ii. cap. 3." But the witch Dame of Jonson was a being not to be found in the popular superstitions of Scotland, or in the King's confiding description of the supernatural evils with which that country was afflicted. Jonson says—"This Dame I make to bear the person of Ate, or Mischief, for so I interpret it out of Homer's description of her." The precision with which the poet describes this personage leaves nothing doubtful for a proper conception of his idea:—"At this the Dame entered to them, naked-armed, bare-footed, her frock tucked, her hair knotted, and folded with vipers; in her hand a torch made of a dead man's arm, lighted, girded with a snake. To whom they all did reverence, and she spake, uttering, by way of question, the end wherefore they came." The Dame of Ben Jonson is thus entirely unconnected with the popular superstitions of his own time and country. But King James had associated the belief in fairies and in witches: "Witches have been transported with the pharie to a hill,

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> A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
> To gi'e them music was his charge:
> He screw'd the pipes, and gart them skirl,
> Till roof and rafters a' did dirl."

which opening they went in and there saw a fairie queen." But James also especially says, that the spirits whom the Gentiles called Diana and her wandering court were known by the name of pharie. It would scarcely be necessary for Shakspere to go farther for his Hecate. "We find the elves occasionally arrayed in the costume of Greece and Rome, and the Fairy Queen and her attendants transformed into Diana and her nymphs, and invested with their attributes and appropriate insignia.—(Delrius, pp. 168, 807.) According to the same author, the Fairy Queen was also called *Habundia*. Like Diana, who, in one capacity, was denominated *Hecate*, the goddess of enchantment, the Fairy Queen is identified, in popular tradition, with the *Gyre-Carline*, *Gay Carline*, or mother-witch of the Scottish peasantry."* But nothing, as it appears to us, so distinctly associates the popular superstition in witchcraft and in fairies,—so distinctly makes the Queen of the Fairies to be also the Queen of the Witches,—as the extraordinary matters revealed in the Aberdeen trials. Accustomed to the stage representations of Shakspere's witches, we shape our notion of his Hecate somewhat according to this statement of Jonson: "Amongst our vulgar witches, the honour of Dame is given with a kind of pre-eminence to some special one at their meetings." Upon the stage, Hecate is a personage with a somewhat longer broom, and a somewhat gayer dress, than the inferior witches; but still one of skinny lip and beard. But shut out these attributes of the tiring-room, and regard alone what Shakspere has set down for his Hecate, and we behold quite another being. She denounces the witches as beldams; she proclaims herself the mistress of their charms; she admits their participation with her in all harms—("the glory of *our* art")—but she lays her commands upon them with an authority before which they tremble. She is surrounded with no vulgar accessaries, of a green cock, a goat, or a horse of wood, such as even the Dame Ate of Jonson rode upon; but she communes with spirits who wait for her in clouds. When she again appears she gives praise and promises reward; and amidst the gloomy solemnities of the witch-incantation she brings music and dancing;—

> "And now about the caldron sing
> Like elves and fairies in a ring."

She was unquestionably meant to be an evil spirit, a mischievous one, something essentially different from the gentle and benevolent Titania, but nevertheless brilliant and beautiful. The Queen of Elphen of poor Andro Man had "the likeness and shape of a woman;" she and her troop rode upon white hackneys; she delighted in "playing and dancing;" she was "very pleasant, and will be old and young when she pleases." And yet, according to the wild imagination of the same poor wizard, she held her unhallowed rites in company with the devil, who was called Christsonday, and they claimed allegiance together from their common subjects. Shakspere certainly could not have found more exact materials for drawing a Fairy Queen essentially different from the "lovely lady" who sat in the "spiced Indian air" gossiping with

* Scott's 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,' vol. ii., p. 279.

a votaress of her order, or slept upon banks of flowers "hull'd with dances and delight."

We might pursue this subject in tracing minutely some minor points of the imagery of Macbeth which might have been derived from the Scottish superstitions. It may be sufficient just to mention one or two of the more striking. The spells of the incantation scene are derived by Shakspere for the most part from the great storehouse of his own imagination. But the last ingredient of the caldron—

> "Grease that's sweaten
> From the murderer's gibbet, throw
> Into the flame,"—

has distinct regard to a special superstition. Johnnet Wischert is thus accused:—"Thou and thy daughter, Violet Leys, desired thy woman to gang with thy said daughter at twelve hours at even to the gallows, and cut down the dead man hanging thereon, and take a part of all his members from him, and burn the dead corpse." This comes nearer to the Shaksperian spell than anything which we find in English superstitions. Even the glorious description of Duncan's horses might have received some colouring from Aberdeen delusions. In describing the prodigies which followed the death of King Duff, Holinshed says, "Horses in Lothian, being of singular beauty and swiftness, did eat their own flesh, and would in no wise taste any other meat." Shakspere has used this:—

> "'T is said, they eat each other."

But he did not find in Holinshed that they

> "Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
> Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would
> Make war with mankind."

The horses of King Duncan have a humble parallel in the oxen of William Smith, in Tarserhill, whom Merjorie Mutche is thus accused of injuring:—"Thou having discord for some alleged wrongs he did you, for revenge of the which thou camest to his plough, he being gangand [going] and tilling the land as use is, and then thou cast thy witchcraft and sorcery on his oxen, through which they instantly run all wod [mad], brak the plough, two thereof ran over the hills to Deir, and other two thereof up Ithan Side, which could never be taken nor apprehended again, which thou did nor canst not deny." Even sheep, according to these accusations, "ran wod and furious, that no man durst look on them, for fear and danger of their lives." Here was material for the poet's imagination to work upon. Or had he heard of the wonderful incident at the storm of Jedburgh, in the reign of Henry VIII., when fifteen hundred horses were "so mad that they ran like wild deer into the field," throwing themselves over rocks, and rushing into the flames of the burning town? Lord Surrey, who writes of these wonders to the King, says,—"Universally all their company say plainly the devil was that night among them six times." *

* See Scott's 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,' vol. i., p. 243.

Othello was acted before Queen Elizabeth, at Harefield, the mansion of her Lord Keeper Ellesmere, in August, 1602.* We have no evidence that it was then acted for the first time, but it was in all probability a new play. Coming so closely upon Shakspere's probable visit to Scotland, in the autumn of 1601, does Othello exhibit any marks, however slight, of Scottish associations? Iago's song,

"King Stephen was a worthy peer,'

is, according to Percy, "supposed to have been originally a Scotch ballad." We may observe that "*lowne*," as given in the first folio edition, rhyming to "crowne," is not an English word. It is the same word that we find in Macbeth, thus printed in the same folio:—

"The diueil damne thee blacke, thou cream-faced *loone*."

It is the Scotch *loon*, rhyming in Iago's song to *croon*. In the same edition of Othello, printed no doubt from Shakspere's manuscript, the last line of Iago's song is thus given;—

"And take thy *awl'd* cloake about thee."

A Scotticism is here clearly intended. But, if it be not to inquire "too curiously," may we not trace one of the most striking passages in Othello to the humble source of an Aberdeen superstition?

"That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
She was *a charmer*, and could almost read
The thoughts of people: she told her, while she kept it
'Twould make her amiable, and subdue my father
Entirely to her love."

In the information against Isobell Straquhan, it is alleged that "the said Isobell came to Elspet Mutray in Wodheid, she being a widow, and asked of her if she had a penny to lend her, and the said Elspet gave her the penny; and the said Isobell took the penny and bowit [bent] it, and took a clout and a piece red wax, and sewed the clout with a thread, the wax and the penny being within the clout, and gave it to the said Elspet Mutray, commanding her to use the said clout to hang about her crag [neck], and when she saw the man whom she loved best, take the clout, with the penny and the wax, and stroke her face therewith, and she so doing, she should attain in to the marriage of that man whom she loved." The "clout" sewed "with a thread" wants, indeed, the poetical colouring of the "handkerchief" of Othello; but still

"There's magic in the web of it."

More curious in the effects produced is another example of the "prophetic fury" of the "Sibyl," Isobell Straquhan. She could not only produce love, but

* 'Egerton Papers,' published by the Camden Society, p. 343.

remove hatred: "Walter Ronaldsone had use to strike his wife, who took consultation with Scudder [alias Straquhan], and she did take pieces of paper, and sew them thick with thread of divers colours, and did put them in the barn amongst the corn, and from henceforth the said Walter did never strike his wife, neither yet once found fault with her, whatsomever she did." He was *subdued*, "entirely to her love."

NOTE ON THE QUEEN OF ELPHEN.

In the highly interesting collection of 'Criminal Trials before the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland,' published from original records by Robert Pitcairn, the learned editor says of the trial of Bessie Dunlop for witchcraft, in 1576, that "it is in every view extremely interesting, but more particularly on account of the very minute and graphic details given by Bessie of many circumstances connected with the prevailing superstition, especially in relation to the Court of Faerie; which, so far as the editor knows, are *not elsewhere to be found.*" This was published in 1829, when the records of the Aberdeen trials were undiscovered. The Fairy superstition of Bessie Dunlop varies considerably from that of Andro Man. Bessie describes many of her meetings with "Thom Reid," a name by which the evil spirit was known to her. He brought her into the company, on one occasion, of "twelve persons, eight women and four men. The men were clad in gentlemen's clothing, and the women had all plaids round about them, and were very seemly like to see." When she asked Thom who they were, he said, "they were the good witches that wynnit [dwelt] in the Court of Elfame." Again, Bessie was asked by Thom Reid if she did not remember that after the birth of a child, "a stout woman came in to her, and sat down on the form beside her, and asked a drink at her, and she gave her; who also told her that that bairn would die, and that her husband should mend of his sickness. The said Bessie answered, that she remembered well thereof; and Thom said, that was the Queen of Elfame, his mistress, who had commanded him to wait upon her and to do her good." In 1588 Alisoun Peirsoun is also indicted "for haunting and repairing with the good neighbours and the Queen of Elfame." But this Queen of Elfame [Elf-holm] has not such a specific connection with witches and witchcraft as the Queen of Elphen of Andro Man, who "has a grip of all the craft."

§ II.

THE fortieth volume of the registers of the Town Council of Aberdeen contains the following entries :—

"Nono Octobris 1601.

"Ordinance to the dean of gild.

"The samen day The prouest Bailleis and counsall ordanis the svme of threttie tua merkis to be gevin to the Kingis serwandes presently in this burcht . . quha playes comedeis and staige playes Be reasoun they ar recommendit be his majesties speciall letter and hes played sum of their comedies in this burcht and ordanis the said svme to be payit to tham be the dean of gild quhilk salbe allowit in his comptis."

"22 Octr 1601.

"The quhilk day Sir Francis Hospitall of Haulszie Knycht Frenschman being recommendit be his majistie to the Prouest Bailleis and Counsall of this brocht to be favorablie Interteneit with the gentilmen his majesties seruands efter specifeit quha war direct to this burcht be his majestie to accumpanie the said Frenshman being ane nobillman of France cumming only to this burcht to sie the towne and cuntrie the said Frenshman with the knightis and gentillmen folowing wer all ressauit and admittit Burgesses of Gild of this burcht quha gawe thair aithis in common form folowis the names of thame that war admittit burgesses

Sir Francis Hospitall of halzie knycht
Sir Claud Hamiltoun of Schawfeild knycht
Sir John Grahame of orkill knycht
Sir John Ramsay of Ester Baronie knycht
James Hay James Auchterlony Robert Ker James Schaw Thomas foster James Gleghorne Dauid Drummond Seruitors to his Majestie
Monsieur de Scheyne Monsieur la Bar Seruitours to the said Sir Francis
James Law
James Hamiltoun seruitour to the said Sir Claud
Archibald Sym Trumpeter
Laurence Fletcher comediane to his majestie.
Mr Dauid Wod
Johne Bronderstainis"

These documents present something more than the facts, that a company of players, specially recommended by the King, were paid a gratuity from the Corporation of Aberdeen for their performances in that town, one of them subsequently receiving the freedom of the borough. The provost, baillies, and council ordain that thirty-two marks should be given to the *King's servants* then in that borough, who played comedies and stage-plays. The circumstance that they are recommended by the King's special letter is not so important as the description of them as the King's servants. Thirteen days after the entry of the 9th of October, at which first period these servants of the King had played some of their comedies, Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty, is admitted a burgess of Guild of the borough of Aberdeen—the greatest honour which the Corporation could bestow. He is admitted to this honour, in com-

pany with a nobleman of France visiting Aberdeen for the gratification of his curiosity, and recommended by the King to be favourably entertained; as well as with three men of rank, and others, who were directed by his Majesty to accompany "the said Frenchman." All the party are described in the document as knights and gentlemen.* We have to inquire, then, who was Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty? Assuredly the King had not in his service a company of Scotch players. In 1599 he had licensed a company of English comedians to play at Edinburgh. Fond as James was of theatrical exhibitions, he had not the means of gratifying his taste, except through the visits of English comedians. Scotland had no drama. Before the Reformation she had her Mysteries, as England had. The Moralities of Lyndsay, of which 'The Satyre of the three Estaitis' is one of the most remarkable, were indeed dialogues, but in no sense of the word dramas. The biting humour, the fierce invectives, the gross obscenity which we find in 'The Satyre of the three Estaitis,' were no doubt the characteristics of other popular exhibitions of the same period. But, taking that singular production as a specimen, they were scarcely so dramatic in their form and spirit as the contemporary productions in England of John Heywood, of which 'The four P's' is a favourable example. 'Philotus'—"Ane verie excellent and delectabill Treatise intitulit Philotvs, qvhairin we may persave the greit inconveniences that fallis out in the Marriage betvvene age and zouth"—belongs to a later period. It was first printed in 1603, and again in 1612, when it was entitled 'a Comedy.' The plot is founded upon one of the stories of Barnaby Rich, told by him in the collection from which Shakspere is supposed to have derived some hints for the conduct of the action in Twelfth Night. The dialogue of 'Philotus' is in verse, not deficient in spirit and harmony, but utterly undramatic—sometimes easy and almost refined, at others quaint and gross beyond all conception. The stanza with which the play opens will furnish some notion of the prevailing metre, and of the poetical tone, of this singular performance:

"O lustie luifsome lamp of licht,
Your bonynes, your bewtie bricht,
Your staitly stature trym and ticht,
With gesture graue and gude:
Your countenance, your cullour cleir,
Your lauching lips, your smyling cheir,
Your properties dois all appear,
My senses to illude."

Until William Alexander appeared in 1603 with his tragedy of 'Darius,' Scotland possessed no literature that could be called dramatic; and it may be doubted if even Alexander's 'Historical Dialogues' can be properly called dramas. We may safely conclude that King James would have no Scottish company of players, because Scotland had no dramas to play.

* Archibald Sym, trumpeter, was a person of dignified occupation. He was no doubt the state-trumpeter, whose business it was to assist in proclaiming the royal commands to the people. In Scottish annals we find constant notices of certain acts of authority notified at Edinburgh "by open proclamation and sound of trumpet at the Cross."

"Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty," was undoubtedly an Englishman; and "the King's servants presently in this borough who play comedies and stage-plays" were as certainly English players. There are not many facts known by which we can trace the history of Lawrence Fletcher. He is not mentioned amongst "the names of the principal actors in all these plays," which list is given in the first folio edition of Shakspere; but he undoubtedly belonged to Shakspere's company. Augustine Phillipps, who, by his will, in 1605, bequeathed a thirty-shilling piece of gold to his "fellow" William Shakspere, also bequeathed twenty shillings to his "fellow" Lawrence Fletcher. But there is more direct evidence than this of the connection of Fletcher with Shakspere's company. The patent of James I., dated at Westminster on the nineteenth of May, 1603, in favour of the players acting at the Globe, is headed "Pro Laurentio Fletcher et Willielmo Shakespeare & aliis;" and it licenses and authorises the performances of "Laurence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillippes, John Hemings, Henrie Condel, William Sly, Robert Armin, Richard Cowly, and the rest of their associates." The connection in 1603 of Fletcher and Shakspere cannot be more distinctly established than by this document. Chalmers says that Fletcher "was placed before Shakspeare and Richard Burbage in King James's licence as much perhaps by accident as by design." * The Aberdeen Register is evidence against this opinion. Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty, is admitted to honours which are not bestowed upon the other King's servants who had acted plays in the borough of Aberdeen in 1601. Lawrence Fletcher is first named in the letters patent of 1603. It is evident, we think, that he was admitted a burgess of Aberdeen as the head of the company, and that he was placed first in the royal licence for the same reason. But there is a circumstance, we apprehend, set forth in the Aberdeen Registers which is not only important with reference to the question of Shakspere having visited Scotland, but which explains a remarkable event in the history of the stage. The company rewarded by the Corporation of Aberdeen on the 9th of October, 1601, were not only recommended by his Majesty's special letter, but they were the King's servants. Lawrence Fletcher, according to the second entry, was comedian to his Majesty. This English company, then, had received an honour from the Scottish King, which had not been bestowed upon them by the English Queen. They were popularly termed the Queen's players about 1590; but, subsequently, we find them invariably mentioned in the official entries as the Lord Chamberlain's servants. As the servants of the first officer of the Court, they had probably higher privileges than the servants of other noblemen; but they were not formally recognised as the Queen's servants during the remainder of Elizabeth's reign. In Gilbert Dugdale's 'The Time Triumphant; declaring in briefe the arival of our Soveraigne Leidge Lord King James into England,' printed in 1604, the author, after noticing that the King "dealt honours as freely to our nations as their hearts could wish," adds, "not only to the indifferent of worth and the worthy of honour did he freely

* 'Apology,' p. 422.

deal about these causes; but to the mean gave grace: as taking to him the late Lord Chamberlain's servants, now the King's actors; the Queen taking to her the Earl of Worcester's servants, that are now her actors; the Prince their son, Henry Prince of Wales, full of hope, took to him the Earl of Nottingham his servants, who are now his actors; so that of Lords' servants they are now the servants of the King, the Queen, and Prince." Mr. Collier, in noticing the licence 'Pro Laurentio Fletcher et Willielmo Shakespeare et aliis,' says that the Lord Chamberlain's company "by virtue of this instrument, in which they are termed 'our servants,' became the King's players, and were so afterwards constantly distinguished."* But the instrument did not create Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspere, and others, the King's servants; it recognises them as the King's servants already appointed:† "Know you that we, of our special grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion, have licensed and authorised, and by these presents do license and authorise, these our servants," &c. They are licensed to use and exercise their art and faculty "as well for the recreation of our loving subjects as for our solace and pleasure, when we shall think good to see them." They are "to show and exercise publicly to their best commodity when the infection of the plague shall decrease, within their now usual house called the Globe," as in all other places. The justices, mayors, sheriffs, and others to whom the letters patent are addressed, are called upon to aid and assist them, and to do them courtesies; and the instrument thus concludes: 'And also what further favour you shall show to these our servants for our sake we shall take kindly at your hands." The terms of this patent exhibit towards the players of the Globe a favour and countenance, almost an affectionate solicitude for their welfare, which is scarcely reconcilable with a belief that they first became the King's players by virtue of this instrument. James arrived in London, at the Charter House, on the 7th of May, 1603. He then removed to the Tower, and subsequently to Greenwich on the 13th. The Privy Seal, directing the letters patent to Fletcher, Shakspere, and others, is dated from Greenwich on the 17th of May; and in that document the exact words of the patent are prescribed. The words of the Privy Seal and of the patent undoubtedly imply some previous appointment of the persons therein named as the King's servants. It appears scarcely possible that during the three days which elapsed between James taking up his residence at Greenwich, and the day on which the Privy Seal is issued, the Lord Chamberlain's servants, at the season of the plague, should have performed before the King, and have so satisfied him that he constituted them his own servants. It would at first seem improbable that amidst the press of business consequent upon the accession, the attention of the King should have been directed to the subject of players at all, especially in the selection of a company as his own servants, contrary to the precedent of the former reign. If these players had been the servants of Elizabeth, their appointment as the servants of James might have been asked as a matter of course; but certain players were at once to be placed

* 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. i., p. 348.

† The proper place for this document will be in a subsequent chapter.

above all their professional brethren, by the King's own act, carried into effect within ten days after his arrival within his new metropolis. But all these objections are removed when we refer to the facts opened to us by the council registers of Aberdeen. King James the Sixth of Scotland had recommended his servants to the magistrates of Aberdeen; and Lawrence Fletcher, there can be no doubt, was one of those servants so recommended. The patent of James the First of England directed to Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspere, and others, eighteen months after the performances at Aberdeen, is directed to those persons as "our servants." It does not appoint them the King's servants, but recognises the appointment as already existing. Can there be a reasonable doubt that the appointment was originally made by the King in Scotland, and subsisted when the same King ascended the English throne? Lawrence Fletcher was admitted a burgess of Guild of the borough of Aberdeen as comedian to his Majesty, in company with other persons who were servitors to his Majesty. He received that honour, we may conclude, as the head of the company, also the King's servants. We know not how he attained this distinction amongst his fellows, but it is impossible to imagine that accident so favoured him in two instances. The King's servant who was most favoured at Aberdeen and the King's servant who is first in the patent in 1603, was surely placed in that position by the voice of his fellows, the other King's servants. William Shakspere is named with him in a marked manner in the heading of the patent. Seven of their fellows are also named, as distinguished from "the

[James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England.]

rest of their associates." There can be no doubt of the identity of the Lawrence Fletcher, the servant of James VI. of Scotland, and the Lawrence Fletcher, the servant of James I. of England. Can we doubt that the King's servants who played comedies and stage plays in Aberdeen, in 1601, were, taken as a company, the King's servants who were licensed to exercise the art and faculty of playing, throughout all the realm, in 1603? If these points are evident, what reason have we to doubt that William Shakspere, the second named in the licence of 1603, was amongst the King's servants at Aberdeen in 1601? Every circumstance concurs in the likelihood that he was of that number recommended by the King's special letter; and his position in the licence, even before Burbage, was, we may well believe, a compliment to him who in 1601 had taught "our James" something of the power and riches of the English drama.

The circumstances which we have thus detailed give us, we think, warranty to conclude that the story of Macbeth might have been suggested to Shakspere upon Scottish ground; that the accuracy displayed in the local descriptions and allusions might have been derived from a rapid personal observation; that some of the peculiarities of his witchcraft imagery might have been found in Scottish superstitions, and more especially in those which we have shown may have been rife at Aberdeen at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Is there anything whatever to contradict the inferences which are justly to be deduced from the records which we have described and commented upon? It cannot be denied, we apprehend, that Shakspere's company was at Aberdeen in the autumn of 1601. There is nothing that we have found which can be opposed to the fair and natural inferences that belong to the registers of the Town Council. The records of the Presbytery of Aberdeen are wholly silent upon the subject of this visit of a company of players to their city. These records, on the 25th of September, 1601, contain an entry regarding Lord Glamis—an entry respecting one of the many deeds of violence for which Scotland was remarkable, when the strong hand so constantly attempted to defy the law: Mr. Patrick Johnson, it seems, had been killed by Lord Glamis, and the fact is here brought under the cognizance of the Presbytery. An entry of the 9th of October deals with Alexander Ceath [Keith], on a charge of adultery. Another of the 23rd of October relates to John Innis. Beyond the 5th of November, when there is another record, it would be unnecessary to seek for any minute regarding the players who were rewarded and honoured by the Town Council. There is no entry whatever on the subject.* If Shakspere's company were at Aberdeen —and to disprove it, it must be shown that Lawrence Fletcher, who was the King of Scotland's comedian in 1601, was not the Lawrence Fletcher who was associated with Shakspere in the patent granted by James upon his accession

* We consulted these documents, which are preserved in the fine library of the Advocates at Edinburgh. We were assisted by very kind friends—William Spalding, Esq., Professor of Rhetoric in the University of Edinburgh (who very early distinguished himself as a critic on Shakspere), and John Hill Burton, Esq. (who possesses the most complete knowledge of the treasures of that valuable library)—in searching for documents that could illustrate this question.

in 1603—what possible reason can there be for supposing that Shakspere was absent from his company upon so interesting an occasion as a visit to the Scottish King and Court? The extraordinary merits of the dramas of Shakspere might have been familiar to the King through books. Previous to 1601, there have been nine undoubted plays of Shakspere's published, which might readily have reached Scotland.* Essex and Southampton were in the habit of correspondence with James; and at the very hour when James officially knew of his accession to the crown of England, he dispatched an order from Holyrood House to the Council of State for the release of Southampton from the Tower. It is not likely that the Lord Chamberlain's servants would have taken the long journey to Scotland upon the mere chance of being acceptable to the Court. If they were desired to come, it is not probable that Shakspere would have been absent. It was probably his usual season of repose from his professional pursuits in London. The last duties to his father's memory might have been performed on the 8th of September, leaving abundant time to reach the Court, whether at Holyrood, or Stirling, or Linlithgow, or Falkland; to be enrolled amongst the servants who performed before the King; and subsequently to have been amongst those his fellows who received rewards on the 9th of October for their comedies and stage-plays at Aberdeen.

In the summer of 1618 Ben Jonson undertook the extraordinary task of travelling to Edinburgh on foot. Bacon said to him with reference to his project, "He loved not to see poesy go on other feet than poetical Dactylus and Spondæus."† Jonson seems to have been proud of his exploit, for in his 'News from the New World discovered in the Moon,' a masque presented at Court in 1620, he makes a printer say, "One of our greatest poets (I know not how good a one) went to Edinburgh on foot, and came back." According to Drummond he was "to write his foot pilgrimage hither, and call it a discovery." We have no traces of Jonson in this journey, except what we derive from the 'Conversations with Drummond,' and the notice of honest John Taylor in his 'Pennilesse Pilgrimage:' "I went to Leith, where I found my long-approved and assured good friend, Master Benjamin Jonson, at one Master John Stuart's house." Jonson remained long enough in Scotland to become familiar with its hospitable people and its noble scenery. He wrote a poem in which he called Edinburgh

"The heart of Scotland, Britain's other eye."

"He hath intention," saith Drummond, "to write a fisher or pastoral play, and set the stage of it in the Lomond Lake." After his return to London, he earnestly solicits Drummond, by letter, to send him "some things concerning the Loch of Lomond." We find nothing in Jonson's poetry that gives us an impression that he had caught any inspiration from the country of mountains and lakes. We have no internal evidence at all that he had been in Scotland

* There is a beautiful copy of the first edition of Love's Labour's Lost, 1598, amongst Drummond's books, preserved apart in the library of the University of Edinburgh.

† 'Conversations with Drummond.'

We have no token of the impress of its mountain scenery upon his mind at all approaching to the distinctness of a famous passage in Shakspere—a solitary passage in a poet who rarely indeeed *describes* any scenery, but one which could scarcely have been written without accurate knowledge of the realities to which "black vesper's pageants" have resemblance:—

> "Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;
> A vapour, sometime, like a bear or lion,
> A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon it, that nod unto the world
> And mock our eyes with air." *

John Taylor, homely as he is, may better enable us to trace Shakspere's probable course. Taylor, also travelling on foot, was a week in reaching Lichfield passing through Coventry. He was another week filling up some time with over-much carousing, before he got out of Manchester. Preston detained him three days with its jollity; and it was another week before, passing over the hills of Westmoreland, he reached Carlisle. Shakspere, setting out on horseback from Stratford, would reach Carlisle by easy stages in six days. Taylor stops not to describe the merry city. It was more to his purpose to enjoy the "good entertainment" of which he there "found store," than to survey its castle and its cathedral; or to look from its elevated points upon fertile meadows watered by the Eden, or the broad Frith, or the distant summits of Crossfell and Skiddaw. Would he had preserved for us some of the ballads that he must have heard in his revelries, that told of the wondrous feats of the bold outlaws who lived in the greenwood around

> "Carlisle, in the north countree."

Assuredly Shakspere had heard of Adam Bell, the brave archer of Inglewood. "He that hits me, let him be clapped on the shoulder and called Adam."† It is pleasant to believe that some snatches of old minstrelsy might have recreated his solitary journey as he rode near the border-land.

Sir Walter Scott, in the delightful introduction to his 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,' says, "The accession of James to the English crown converted the extremity into the centre of his kingdom." The Scottish poet would seem to have borrowed the idea from a very humble English brother of the craft:—

> "For now those crowns are both in one combin'd,
> Those former borders that each one confin'd
> Appears to me (as I do understand)
> To be almost the centre of the land:
> This was a blessed heaven-expounded riddle
> To thrust great kingdoms' skirts into the middle."‡

John Taylor trudges from Carlisle into Annandale, wading through the Esk, and wondering that he saw so little difference between the two countries, seeing

* Antony and Cleopatra, one of Shakspere's later plays.
† Much Ado about Nothing. ‡ Taylor's 'Pennilesse Pilgrimage.'

[Carlisle.]

that Scotland had its sun and sky, its sheep, and corn, and good ale. But he tells us that in former times this border-land

"Was the curs'd climate of rebellious crimes."

According to him, and he was not far wrong, pell-mell fury and hurly-burly, spoiling and wasting, sharking, shifting, cutting throats, and thieving, constituted the practice both of Annandale and Cumberland. When Taylor made his pilgrimage, the existing generation would have a very fresh recollection of these outrages of former times. If Shakspere travelled over this ground, he would be more familiar with the passionate hatreds of the borderers, and would hear many a song which celebrated their deadly feuds, and kept alive the spirit of rapine and vengeance. As recently as 1596 the famous Raid of Carlisle had taken place, when the Lord of Buccleuch, then Warden of Liddesdale, surprised the Castle of Carlisle, and carried off a daring Scotch freebooter, Kinmont Willie, who had been illegally seized by the Warden of the West Marches of England, Lord Scrope. The old ballad which, forty years ago, was preserved by tradition on the western borders of Scotland, was perhaps sung by many a sturdy clansman at the beginning of the seventeenth century:—

"Wi' coulters, and wi' forehammers,
We garr'd the bars bang merrilie,
Until we came to the inner prison,
Where Willie o' Kinmont he did lie.

And when we cam' to the lower prison,
Where Willie o' Kinmont he did lie—
'O sleep ye, wake ye, Kinmont Willie,*
Upon the morn that thou's to die?'" †

But the feuds of the Scotch and English borderers were not the only causes of insecurity on the western frontier. If the great dramatic poet, who has painted so vividly the desolation of civil war in his own country, had passed through Annandale in 1601, he would have seen the traces of a petty civil war which was then raging between the clans of Maxwell and Johnstone, who a few years before had met in deadly conflict on the very ground over which he would pass. The Lord of Maxwell, with a vast band of followers, had been slain without quarter. This was something different from the quiet security of England—a state of comparative blessedness that Shakspere subsequently described in Cranmer's prophecy of the glories of Elizabeth :—

"In her days every man shall eat in safety,
Under his own vine, what he plants; and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours." ‡

The penniless pilgrim travelled over this ground when the security of England had been extended to Scotland; and he found no greater dangers than wading through the Esk and the Annan, and no severer evils than sleeping in a poor hut upon the hard ground, with dirty pigeons roosting around him.§

Place the poet safely in Edinburgh, after he has made his solitary journey of three hundred miles, through unaccustomed scenery, partly amongst foreign people and strange manners. A new world has been opened to him. He has left behind him his old fertile midland counties, their woods, their corn-fields now ripe for the harvest, to pass over wild moorlands with solemn mountains shutting in the distance, now following the course of a brawling stream through a fertile valley, cultivated and populous, and then again climbing the summit of some gloomy fell, from which he looks around, and may dream he is in a land where man has never disturbed the wild deer and the eagle. He looks at one time upon

"Turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,
And flat meads thatch'd with stover,"

and he may say with the Water Poet, "I thought myself in England still." He is presently in the gorge of the mountains, and there are fancies awakening in him which are to shape themselves not into description, but into the delineations of high passions which are to be created out of lofty moods of the mind. In Edinburgh he meets his fellows. The probability is that the Court

* The snatch of melody in Lear, in all likelihood part of an English song, will occur to the reader:—

"Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd?

† 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,' vol. ii., p. 58.

‡ Henry VIII., Act v.

§ Taylor tells several portions of his adventures in plain prose; and we know of no better picture of the country and its manners than his simple descriptions furnish.

[Holyrood House.]

is not there, for it is the hunting season. Holyrood is a winter palace; and Edinburgh is not then a city particularly attractive to the Scottish King, who has not forgotten the perils and indignities he has endured through the influence of the stern and uncompromising ministers of religion, who would have made the temporal power wholly submissive to the spiritual. The timid man has conquered, but all his actions are there viewed with jealousy and malevolence; and the English players may afford him safer pleasures in other places than where their "unruliness and immodest behaviour" are uncharitably denounced duly from the pulpit. Shakspere may rest at Edinburgh a day or two; and the impressions of that city will not easily be forgotten:—a town in which the character of the architecture would seem to vie with the bold scenery in which it is placed, full of historical associations, the seat of Scottish learning and authority, built for strength and defence as much as for magnificence and comfort, whose mansions are fastnesses that would resist an assault from a rival chief or a lawless mob. He looks for a short space upon the halls where she who fell before the arbitrary power of his own Queen lived in her days of beauty and youthfulness, surrounded by false friends and desperate enemies, weak and miserable. He sees the pulpits from which Knox thundered, the University which James had founded, and the Castle for whose possession Scotch and English had fought with equal bravery, but varying success. He has gained materials for future reflection.

The country palaces of the Scottish Kings inhabited at that period were Linlithgow, Stirling, and Falkland. The gentle lake, the verdant park of Linlithgow were suited for a summer palace. It was the favourite residence of Mary of Guise, Queen of James V. "Gude Schir David Lindsay," Lion King at Arms under James V., here presented to the Court and people his 'Satyre of the Three Estaitis;' and, whatever be his defects, no one can doubt that he possessed a strong vein of humour, and had the courage to speak out boldly of public vice and private immorality, as a poet ought to speak. The conclusion of the drama offers a pleasant sample of the freedom with which these old writers could address even a courtly audience:—

"Now, let ilk man his way avance,
Let sum ga drink, and sum ga dance:
Menstrell, blaw up ane brawll of France,
Let se quha hobbils best:
For I will rin, incontinent,
To the tavern, or ever I stent:
And pray to God, omnipotent,
To send you all gude rest.

If the halls of Linlithgow had witnessed the performance of one of Shakspere

[Linlithgow.]

comedies by the company of Lawrence Fletcher, no changes in taste during half a century could be more striking than such a contrast of the new drama of England with the old drama of Scotland. But we apprehend that Lawrence Fletcher went in another direction.

The English comedians, servants to James VI., might have contributed to the solace and recreation of the King in the noble castle where he was born. Seven years before Stirling had been the scene of rare festivities, on the occa-

[Stirling.

sion of the baptism of Prince Henry. It was a place fit for a monarch's residence. From these walls he could look at once upon the fertility and the grandeur of his dominions—its finest river, its boldest mountains, the vale of the Forth, and the summits of Ben Lomond. He could here cherish the proudest recollections of his country's independence. Stirling must have been dear to James as the residence of his boyhood, where he learnt to make Latin verses from Buchanan, the most elegant of pedagogues. He would, perhaps, be prouder of his school-room in the old castle than of its historical associations, and would look with greater delight upon the little valley where he had once seen a gentle tournament, than upon the battle-fields of Cambuskenneth and Bannockburn. Stirling was better fitted for the ceremonial displays of the

Scottish Court than the quiet residence of a monarch like James VI. We have seen no record of such displays in the autumn of 1601.

Dunfermline was the jointure house of Anne of Denmark, and her son Charles was here born in November, 1600. It was a quiet occasional retreat from the turmoil of Edinburgh. But the favourite residence of James in the "latter summer" and autumn was Falkland. The account published by authority of the Gowrie conspiracy opens with a distinct picture of the King's habits: "His Majesty having his residence at Falkland, and being daily at the buck-hunting (as his use is in that season), upon the fifth day of August, being Tuesday, he rode out to the park, between six and seven of the clock in the morning, the weather being wonderful pleasant and seasonable." A record in Melville's Diary,* within three weeks of this period, gives us another picture of the King and the Court: "At that time, being in Falkland, I saw a fuscambulus Frenchman play strong and incredible praticks upon stented [stretched] tackle in the palace-close before the King, Queen, and whole Court. This was politicly done to mitigate the Queen and people for Gowrie's slaughter; even then was Henderson tried before us, and Gowrie's pedagogue who had been buted [booted, tortured]." In the great hall of the palace of Falkland, of which enough remains to show its extent and magnificence, we think it probable that Lawrence Fletcher and his fellows exhibited very different performances in the following autumn. They would have abundant novelties to present to the Scottish Court, for all would be new. At the second Christmas after James had ascended the English throne, the early plays of Shakspere were as much in

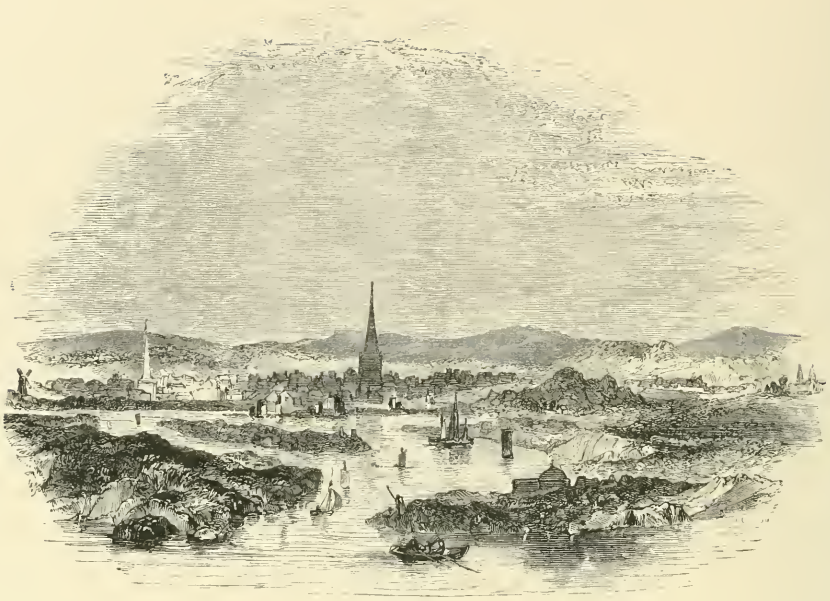
* Quoted in Pitcairn's 'Trials,' vol. ii., p. 23

[Falkland.]

request at the Court as those which belong to a later period. The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, Henry V., The Merchant of Venice, all the productions of the previous century, were produced at Court, and the King commanded The Merchant of Venice a second time. The constant performance of Shakspere's plays, as shown by the accounts of the Revels, at this early period after James's accession, would seem to indicate something like a previous acquaintance with them; and this acquaintance we may justly assume took place upon the visit of Lawrence Fletcher and his company to Scotland in the autumn of 1601.

From Falkland to Aberdeen would be a considerable journey in those days of neglected roads, when rivers had to be forded, and mountains crossed by somewhat perilous paths. It is not improbable that the company halted at Perth, which was within a morning's ride of Falkland. The Presbytery of that town, as we have seen, were more favourably disposed some twelve years before to theatrical performances than the ministers of religion at Edinburgh; they tolerated them under wise restrictions. The King, in 1601, was anxious to stand well with the people of Perth, and he became a burgess of the city, and banqueted with the citizens. It "was politicly done," as Melville says of the French rope-dancer. He might venture in that city to send his servants the players to amuse the people; for those who had supported his leanings towards Episcopalian Church government were strong there, and would gladly embrace any occasion to cultivate amusements that were disagreeable to their ascetic opponents. The same feelings would prevail still more strongly at Aberdeen. The young citizens of Bon Accord, as it was called, clung to the amusements of the older times, the Robin Hoods and Queens of May, in spite of the prohibitions of their magistrates. The Kirk Session prohibited maskers and dancers, but the people still danced; and upon the solemn occasion when the popish Earls of Huntley and Errol were received into the bosom of the Kirk, upon renouncing their errors, there was music and masking around the Cross, and universal jollity was mingled with the more solemn ceremonials. The people of Aberdeen were a loyal people, and we are not surprised that they welcomed the King's players with rewards and honours.

There is preserved, in the Library of Advocates, a very curious description of Aberdeen in the middle of the seventeenth century, written originally in Latin by James Gordon, parson of Rothemay, with a contemporary translation. The latter has been lately printed by the Spalding Club. The changes during half a century would not be very considerable; and the English players would therefore have sojourned in a city which, according to this authority, "exceeds not only the rest of the towns in the north of Scotland, but likewise any city whatsomever of that same latitude, for greatness, beauty, and frequency of trading." Gordon's description is accompanied by a large and well-executed plan, which has also been published; and certainly the new and old towns of Aberdeen, as they existed in those days, were spacious, and judiciously laid out, with handsome public buildings and well-arranged streets, backed by wooded gardens,—a pleasant place to look upon, with fruitful fields immediately around it, though "anywhere you pass a mile without the town the



[Aberdeen.]

country is barren like, the hills scraggy, the plains full of marshes and mosses." The parson of Rothemay, with a filial love for his native place, says, "The air is temperate and healthful about it, and it may be that the citizens owe the acuteness of their wits thereunto, and their civil inclinations." This, indeed, was a community fitted to appreciate the treasures which Lawrence Fletcher and his fellows would display before them; and it is to the honour of Aberdeen that, in an age of strong prejudices, they welcomed the English comedians in a way which vindicated their own character for "wisdom, learning, gallantry, breeding, and civil conversation." It is not to those who so welcomed them that we must chiefly lay the charge of the witch persecutions. In almost every case these atrocities were committed under the sanction of the Kirk Session; and in the same way, when a stern religious asceticism became the dominant principle in England, the feeling of religious earnestness, lofty as it was in many essentials, too often was allied with superstitious enthusiasm, which blinded the reason and blunted the feelings as fearfully as the worst errors of the ancient Church. The tolerant Shakspere would have listened to the stories of these persecutions with the same feelings with which he regarded the ruins of the great Dominican convent at Aberdeen, which was razed to the ground in 1560. A right principle was in each case wrongly directed: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil."

We have thus, upon evidence that we cannot doubt of Shakspere's company

being at Aberdeen in October, 1601, assumed that Shakspere would naturally be of the number; having endeavoured previously to show that his tragedy of Macbeth, especially, exhibits traces of local knowledge which might have been readily collected by him in the exact path of such a journey. We have attempted very slightly to sketch the associations with which he might have been surrounded during this progress, putting these matters, of course, hypothetically, as materials for the reader to embody in his own imagination. We may conclude the subject by very briefly tracing his path homeward.

Honest John Taylor, who seems to have been ready for every kindness that fortune could bestow upon him, left Edinburgh in better guise than he came thither: "Within the port, or gate, called the Netherbow, I discharged my pockets of all the money I had: and as I came penniless within the walls of that city at my first coming thither, so now, at my departing from thence, I came moneyless out of it again." But he soon found a worthy man ready to help him in his straits: "Master James Acmootye, coming for England, said, that if I would ride with him, that neither I nor my horse should want betwixt that place and London." If we take Taylor as our guide, we may see how Shakspere journeyed with his fellows upon the great high road between Edinburgh and London. On the first day they would ride to Dunbar; on the second day they would reach Berwick. They might lodge at an inn, but the exuberance of the ancient Scotch hospitality would probably afford them all welcome in the stronghold of some wealthy laird. Taylor thus describes the hospitality of his hosts at Cober-spath [Cockburns path], between Dunbar and Berwick: "Suppose ten, fifteen, or twenty men and horses come to lodge at their house, the men shall have flesh, tame and wild fowl, fish, with all variety of good cheer, good lodging, and welcome; and the horses shall want neither hay nor provender: and at the morning at their departure the reckoning is just nothing. This is this worthy gentleman's use, his chief delight being only to give strangers entertainment gratis." His description of the hospitality "in Scotland beyond Edinburgh" is more remarkable:—"I have been at houses like castles for building; the master of the house his beaver being his blue bonnet, one that will wear no other shirts but of the flax that grows on his own ground, and of his wife's, daughters', or servants' spinning; that hath his stockings, hose, and jerkin of the wool of his own sheep's backs; that never (by his pride of apparel) caused mercer, draper, silk-man, embroiderer, or haberdasher to break and turn bankrupt; and yet this plain homespun fellow keeps and maintains thirty, forty, fifty servants, or perhaps more, every day relieving three or four score poor people at his gate; and, besides all this, can give noble entertainment, for four or five days together, to five or six Earls and Lords, besides Knights, Gentlemen, and their followers, if they be three or four hundred men and horse of them, where they shall not only feed but feast, and not feast but banquet; this is a man that desires to know nothing so much as his duty to God and his King, whose greatest cares are to practise the works of piety, charity, and hospitality: he never studies the consuming art of fashionless fashions, he never tries his strength to bear four or five hundred acres on his back at once; his legs are always at liberty—not being fettered with golden garters, and manacled

with artificial roses, whose weight (sometime) is the relics of some decayed lordship. Many of these worthy housekeepers there are in Scotland: amongst some of them I was entertained; from whence I did truly gather these aforesaid observations."

The Water Poet passes through Berwick without a word. The poet of Henry IV. would associate it with vivid recollections of his own Hotspur:—

> "He had byn a march-man all hys dayes,
> And kepte Barwyke upon Twede." *

He was now in the land of old heroic memories, which had reached the ear of his boyhood in his own peaceful Stratford, through the voice of the wandering harper; and which Froissart had recorded in a narrative as spirited as the fancies of "the old song of Percy and Douglas." The dark blue Cheviots lifted their summits around him, and beneath them were the plains which the Douglas wasted, who

> "Boldely brente Northomberlonde,
> And haryed many a towyn."

He was in the land which had so often been the battle-field of Scotch and English in the chivalrous days, when war appeared to be carried on as much for sport as for policy, and a fight and a hunting were associated in the same song. The great battle of Otterbourn, in 1388, "was as valiantly foughten as could be devised," says Froissart; "for Englishmen on the one party, and Scots on the other party, are good men of war: for when they meet there is a hard fight without sparring; there is no love between them as long as spears, axes, or daggers will endure, but lay on each upon other; and when they be well beaten, and that the one part hath obtained the victory, they then glorify so in their deeds of arms and are so joyful, that such as be taken they shall be ransomed or they go out of the field, so that shortly each of them is so content with other, that at their departing courteously they will say, God thank you; but in fighting one with another there is no play nor sparring." The spirit that moved the Percy and Douglas at Otterbourn animated the Percy and another Douglas at Holmedon in 1402.

> "On Holy-rood day, the gallant Hotspur there,
> Young Harry Percy, and brave Archibald,
> That ever valiant and approved Scot,
> At Holmedon met,
> Where they did spend a sad and bloody hour." †

The scene of this conflict was not many miles from Berwick. A knowledge of these localities was not necessary for Shakspere, to produce his magnificent creation of Hotspur. But in a journey through Northumberland the recollections of Hotspur would be all around him. At Alnwick, he would ride by the

* 'The Battle of Otterbourne.'

† Henry IV., Part I., Act I., Scene I.

[Berwick.]

gate which Hotspur built, and look upon the Castle in which the Percies dwelt. Two centuries had passed since Hotspur fell at Shrewsbury; but his memory lived in the ballads of his land, and the dramatic poet had bestowed upon it a more lasting glory. The play of Henry IV. was written before the union of England and Scotland under one crown, and when the two countries had constant feuds which might easily have broken out into actual war. But Shakspere, at the very time when the angry passions of England were excited by the Raid of Carlisle, thus made his favourite hero teach the English to think honourably of their gallant neighbours:—

"*P. Henry.* The noble Scot, lord Douglas, when he saw
The fortune of the day quite turn'd from him,
The noble Percy slain, and all his men
Upon the foot of fear, fled with the rest;
And, falling from a hill, he was so bruis'd
That the pursuers took him. At my tent
The Douglas is; and I beseech your grace
I may dispose of him.
K. Hen. With all my heart.
P. Hen. Then, brother John of Lancaster, to
This honourable bounty shall belong:
Go to the Douglas, and deliver him
Up to his pleasure, ransomless, and free:
His valour, shown upon our crests to-day,

Hath taught us how to cherish such high deeds,
Even in the bosom of our adversaries." *

John Taylor contrived to be eighteen days on the road riding from Edinburgh to London: he was fifteen days in his progress from Berwick to Islington. Lawrence Fletcher and his fellows would make greater speed, and linger not so recklessly over the good cheer of the inns and mansions that opened their gates to them. "The way from Berwick to York and so to London" is laid down very precisely in Harrison's 'Description of England;' and the several stages present a total of 260 miles. The route thus given makes a circuit of several miles at Tadcaster; and yet it is 82 miles shorter than the present distance from Berwick to London. Taylor says, "The Scots do allow almost as large measure of their miles as they do of their drink." So it would appear they did also in England in the days of Shakspere. Sir Robert Carey crept out of the Palace of Richmond, where Elizabeth had just died, at three o'clock in the morning of Thursday the 24th of March, and he reached Edinburgh on the night of Saturday the 26th. He had of course relays of horses. Lawrence Fletcher and his fellows without this advantage would be ten or twelve days on the same road.

* Henry IV., Part I., Act v., Scene v.

Alnwick Castle.]

[Hall of the Middle Temple.]

CHAPTER IX.

LABOURS AND REWARDS.

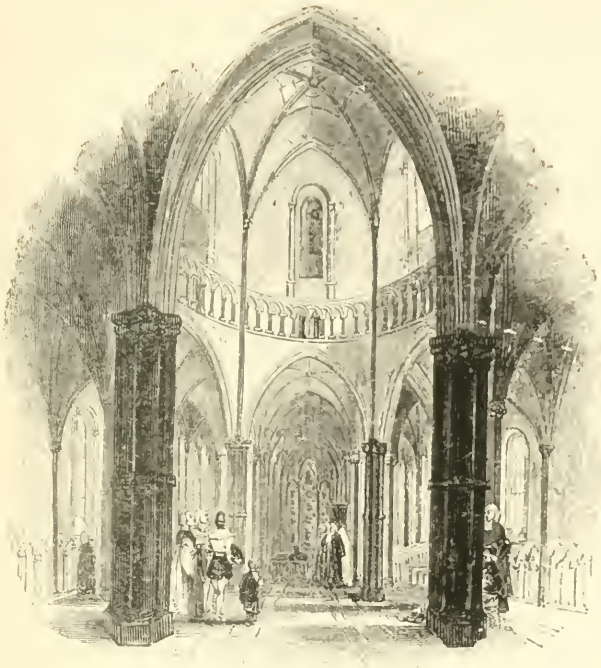
'At our feast we had a play called Twelve Night; or, What you Will, much like the Comedy of Errors, or Menechmus in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practise in it to make the steward believe his lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfayting a letter, as from a lady, in generall termes telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gestures, inscribing his apparaile, &c., and then when he came to practise, making him beleeve they tooke him to be mad." The student of the Middle Temple, whose little diary, after snugly lying amongst the Harleian Manuscripts, now in the British Museum, unnoticed for two centuries and a quarter, luckily turned up to give us one authentic memorial of a play of Shakspere's, is a facetious and gossiping young gentleman, who appears to have mixed with actors and authors, recording the scandal which met his ear with a diligent credulity. The 2nd of February, 1602, was the Feast of the

Purification, which feast and All-Hallown Day, according to Dugdale, "are the only feasts in the whole year made purposely for the Judges and Serjeants of this Society, but of later time divers noblemen have been mixed with them." The order of entertainment on these occasions is carefully recorded by the same learned antiquary.* The scarlet robes of the Judges and Serjeants, the meat carried to the table by gentlemen of the house under the bar, the solemn courtesies, the measures led by the Ancient with his white staff, the call by the reader at the cupboard "to one of the gentlemen of the bar, as he is walking or dancing with the rest, to give the Judges a song," the bowls of hypocras presented to the Judges with solemn congees by gentlemen under the bar,—all these ceremonials were matter of grave arrangement according to the most exact precedents. But Dugdale also tells us of "Post Revels performed by the better sort of the young gentlemen of the Society, with galliards, corantos, and other dances; or else with stage plays." The historian does not tell us whether the stage plays were performed by the young gentlemen of the Society, or by the professional players. The exact description which the student gives of the play of Twelfth Night would lead us to believe that it had not been previously familiar to him. It was not printed. The probability therefore is that it was performed by the players, and by Shakspere's company. The vicinity of the Blackfriars would necessarily render the members of the two Societies well acquainted with the dramas of Shakspere, and with the poet himself. There would be other occasions than the feast days of the Society that Shakspere would be found amidst those Courts. Amongst "the solemn temples" which London contained, no one would present a greater interest than that ancient edifice in which he might have listened, when a young man, to the ablest defender of the Church which had been founded upon the earlier religion of England; one who did not see the wisdom of wholly rejecting all ceremonials consecrated by habit and tradition; who eloquently wrote—"Of Law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world: all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power."† It was in the spirit of this doctrine that Shakspere himself wrote—

> "The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,
> Observe degree, priority, and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office, and custom, in all line of order."‡

Dugdale's 'Origines' was published six years after the Restoration. He speaks of the solemn revels of the Inns of Court, with reference to their past and to their existing state. They had wont to be entertained with Post Revels, which had their dances and their stage plays. This was before the domination of the Puritans, when stage plays and dancing were equally denounced, as "the very works, the pomps, inventions, and chief delights of the devil."§

* 'Origines Juridiciales,' p. 205. † Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' Book I.
‡ Troilus and Cressida, Act I., Scene III. § Prynne's 'Histrio-Mastix.'



[Interior of the Temple Church.]

There is a passage in Dugdale which shows how the revels at the Inns of Court gradually changed their character according to the prevailing opinions:—"When the last measure is dancing, the Reader at the Cupboard calls to one of the Gentlemen of the Bar, as he is walking or dancing with the rest, to give the Judges a *song:* who forthwith begins the first line of any *psalm* as he thinks fittest; after which all the rest of the company follow, and sing with him." This is very like the edifying practice of the Court of Francis I., where the psalms of Clement Marot were sung to a fashionable jig, or a dance of Poitou.* Shakspere had good authority when he made the clown say of his three-man song-men, "They are most of them means and basses: but one Puritan amongst them, and he sings psalms to hornpipes." † This is one of the few allusions which Shakspere has to that rising sect, which in a few years was to become the dominant power in the state. Ben Jonson attacks them again and again with the most bitter indignation and the coarsest satire.‡ The very hardest gird which Shakspere has at them is contained in the gentle reproof of Sir Toby to the steward, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" In this very scene of Twelfth Night he ridicules the unreasoning hostility with which the Puritans themselves were assailed by the ignorant multitude. Sir Toby asks to be told something of the steward:—

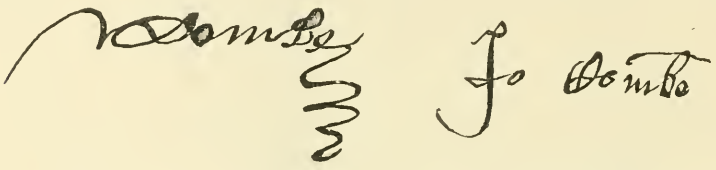
* See Warton's 'History of English Poetry,' Section xlv.

† Winter's Tale, Act iv. Scene ii. ‡ See 'The Alchymist,' and 'Bartholomew Fair'

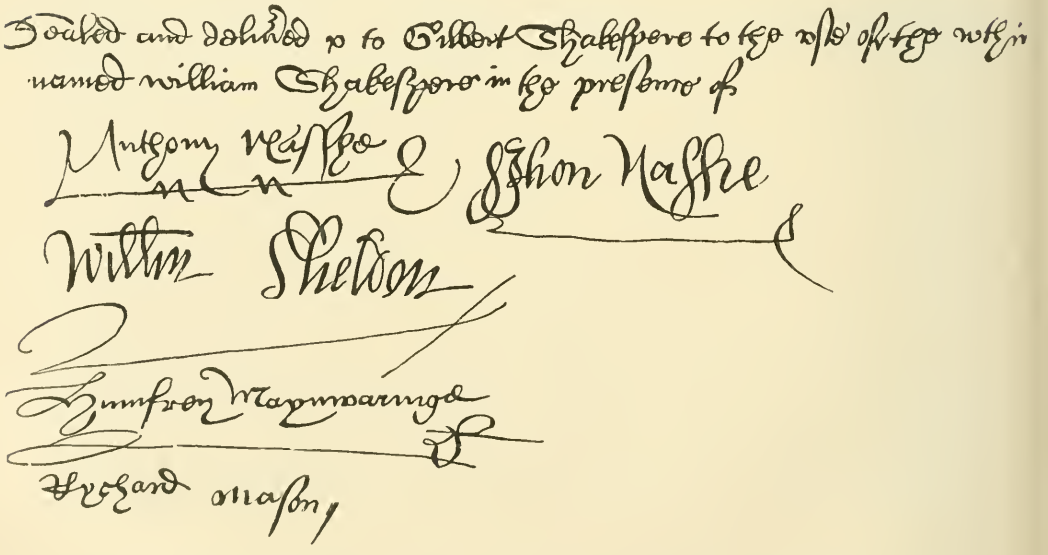
"*Mar.* Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan.
Sir And. O, if I thought that, I 'd beat him like a dog.
Sir Toby. What, for being a Puritan? thy exquisite reason, dear knight?
Sir And. I have no exquisite reason for 't, but I have reason good enough."

This is in the best spirit of toleration, which cannot endure that any body of men should be persecuted for their opinions, and especially by those who will show no reason for their persecution but that they "have reason good enough."

In May, 1602, Shakspere made a large addition to his property at Stratford by the purchase, from William and John Combe, for the sum of three hundred and twenty pounds, of one hundred and seven acres of arable land in the town of Old Stratford. The indenture, which was in the possession of the late Mr. Wheler of Stratford, but is now in the Stratford Museum, is dated the 1st of May, 1602.* The conveyance bears the signatures of the vendors of the property, of which the following are fac-similes. But although it concludes in the usual



form, "The parties to these presents having interchangeably set to their hands and seals," the counterpart has not the hand and seal of the purchaser of the property described in the deed as "William Shakespere, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the countie aforesaid, Gentleman." The counterpart is not signed, and the piece of wax which is affixed to it is unimpressed with any seal. The acknowledgment of possession is, however, thus recorded:—



* The document, which contains nothing remarkable in its clauses, is given in Mr. Wheler's History of Stratford-upon-Avon.

The property is delivered to Gilbert Shakspere to the use of William. Gilbert was two years and a half younger than William, and in all likelihood was the cultivator of the land which the poet thus bought, or assisted their father in the cultivation.

We collect from this document that William Shakspere was not at Stratford on the 1st of May, 1602, and that his brother Gilbert was his agent for the payment of the three hundred and twenty pounds paid "at and before the sealing" of the conveyance. In the following August the Lord Chamberlain's company performed Othello in the house of the Lord Keeper at Harefield. The accounts of the large expenditure on this occasion, in the handwriting of Sir Arthur Mainwaring, were discovered by Mr. Collier amongst the Egerton Papers, and they contain the following entry :—

> "6 August, 1602. Rewardes to the vaulters, players, and daunсers. Of this x^li^ to Burbidge's players for Othello, lxiiij^li^ xviij^s^. x^d^." *

The Queen came to Harefield on the 31st of July, and remained there during the 1st and 2nd of August. In those days Harefield Place was "a fair house standing on the edge of the hill, the river Coln passing near the same through the pleasant meadows and sweet pastures yielding both delight and profit." This is Norden's description, a little before the period of Elizabeth's visit. The Queen was received, after the usual quaint fashion of such entertainments, with a silly dialogue between a bailiff and a dairymaid, as she entered the domain; and the house welcomed her with an equally silly colloquy between Place and Time. The Queen must have been somewhat better pleased when a copy of verses was delivered to her in the morning, beginning

> "Beauty's rose, and virtue's book,
> Angel's mind, and angel's look."

The weather, we learn from the same verses, was unpropitious :

> "Only poor St. Swithin now
> Doth bear you blame his cloudy brow."

Some great poet was certainly at work upon this occasion, but not Shakspere. It was enough for him to present the sad story of

> "The gentle lady married to the Moor."

Another was to come within some thirty years who should sing of Harefield

* This important entry was first published by Mr. Collier in his 'New Particulars regarding the Works of Shakespeare,' 1836. Mr. Collier in the same tract publishes "a poetical relic," of which he says, "Although I believe it to be his, I have some hesitation in assigning it to Shakespeare." This copy of verses, without date or title, found amongst the same papers, bears the signature W. Sh. or W. Sk. (Mr. Collier is doubtful which). If the verses contained a single line which could not be produced by any one of the "mob of gentlemen who write with ease," we would venture to borrow a specimen.

† These verses, with other particulars of the entertainment, were first published from an original manuscript in Nicholls's 'Progresses of Queen Elizabeth.'

with the power of a rare fancy working upon classical models, and who thus makes the Genius of the Wood address a noble audience in that sylvan scene :—

> "For know, by lot from Jove I am the Power
> Of this fair wood, and live in oaken bower,
> To nurse the saplings tall, and curl the grove
> With ringlets quaint, and wanton windings wove.
> And all my plants I save from nightly ill
> Of noisome winds, and blasting vapours chill
> And from the boughs brush off the evil dew,
> And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue,
> Or what the cross dire-looking planet smites,
> Or hurtful worm with canker'd venom bites.
> When evening gray doth rise, I fetch my round
> Over the mount, and all this hallow'd ground;
> And early, ere the odorous breath of morn
> Awakes the slumb'ring leaves, or tassel'd horn
> Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,
> Number my ranks, and visit every sprout
> With puissant words, and murmurs made to bless."

Doubly honoured Harefield! Though thy mansion has perished, yet are thy groves still beautiful. Still thy summit looks out upon a fertile valley, where the gentle river wanders in silent beauty. But thy woods and lawns have a charm which are wholly their own.—Here the Othello of William Shakspere

[Harefield.]

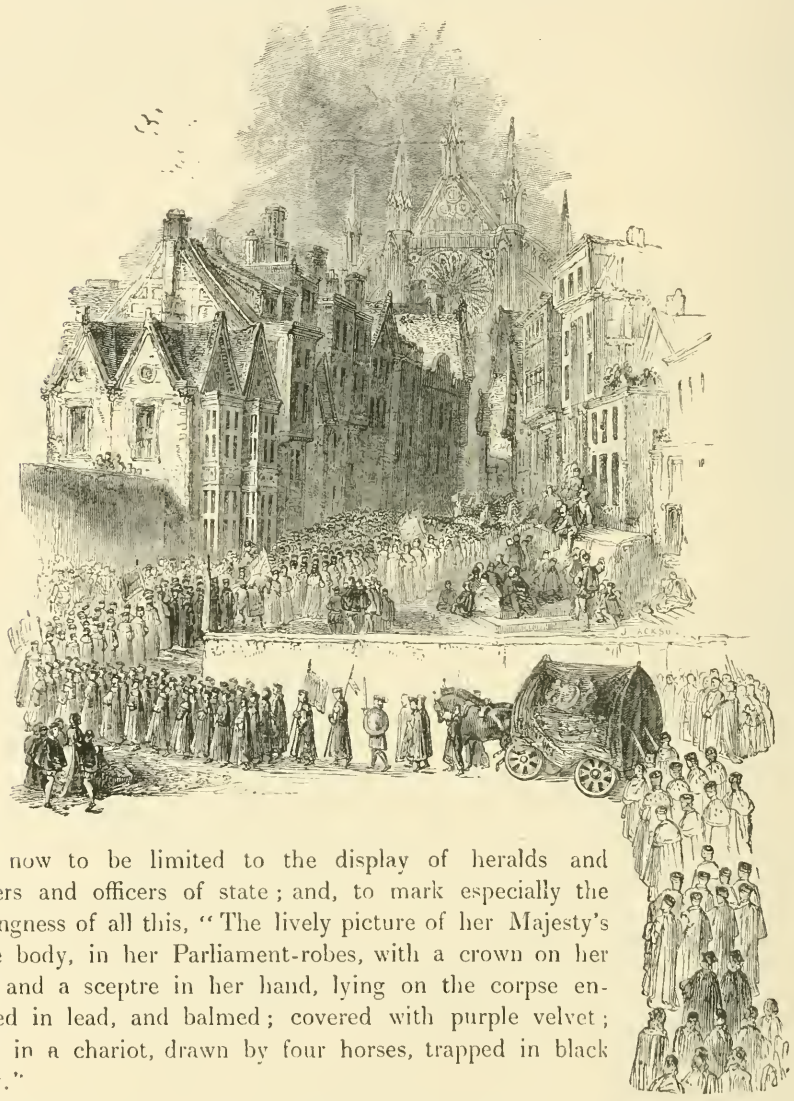
was acted by his own company; here is the scene of the Arcades of John Milton.

Amongst the few papers rescued from "time's devouring maw" which enable us to trace Shakspere's career with any exactness, there is another which relates to the acquisition of property in the same year. It is a copy of Court Roll for the Manor of Rowington, dated the 28th of September, 1602, containing the surrender by Walter Getley to the use of William Shakspere of a house in Stratford, situated in Walker Street. This tenement was opposite Shakspere's house of New Place. It is now taken down; it was in existence a few years ago.

This document, which was in the possession of Mr. Hunt, the worthy town-clerk of Stratford, but has been presented by him to the Museum formed at the Shakspere House, shows that at the latter end of September, 1602, William Shakspere, the purchaser of this property, was not at Stratford. It could not legally pass to him, being a copyhold, till he had done suit and service in the Lord's Court; and the surrender, therefore, provides that it should remain in the possession of the lord till he, the purchaser, should appear.

In the September of 1602 the Earl of Worcester, writing to the Earl of Shrewsbury, says, "We are frolic here in Court, much dancing in the Privy Chamber of country-dances before the Queen's Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith." In the December she was entertained at Sir Robert Cecil's house in the Strand, and some of the usual devices of flattering mummery were exhibited before her. A few months saw a period to the frolic and the flattery. The last entry in the books of the Treasurer of the Chamber during the reign of Elizabeth, which pertains to Shakspere, is the following;—melancholy in the contrast between the Candlemas-Day of 1603, the 2nd of February, and the following 24th of March, when Elizabeth died:—"To John Hemynges and the rest of his companie, servaunts to the Lorde Chamberleyne, uppon the Councells Warraunte, dated at Whitehall the xxth of Aprill, 1603, for their paines and expences in presentinge before the late Queenes Mtie twoe playes, the one uppon St. Stephens day at nighte, and thother upon Candlemas day at night, for ech of which they were allowed, by way of her Mtis rewarde,

tenne poundes, amounting in all to xx^{li}." The late Queen's Majesty! Before she had seen the play on Candlemas-day, at night, she had taken Sir Robert Carey by the hand, and wrung it hard, saying, "Robin, I am not well." At the date of the Council's warrant to John Hemings, Elizabeth had not been deposited in the resting-place of Kings at Westminster. Her pomp and glory



were now to be limited to the display of heralds and banners and officers of state; and, to mark especially the nothingness of all this, "The lively picture of her Majesty's whole body, in her Parliament-robes, with a crown on her head, and a sceptre in her hand, lying on the corpse enshrined in lead, and balmed; covered with purple velvet; borne in a chariot, drawn by four horses, trapped in black velvet."

King James I. of England left his good city of Edinburgh on the 5th of April, 1603. He was nearly five weeks on the road, banqueting wherever he rested; at one time releasing prisoners, "out of his princely and Christian commiseration," and at another hanging a cut-purse taken in the fact. He entered the immediate neighbourhood of London in a way that certainly

monarch never entered before or since :—"From Stamford Hill to London was made a train with a tame deer, that the hounds could not take it faster than his Majesty proceeded." On the 7th of May he was safely lodged at the Charter-House; and one of his first acts of authority in the metropolis, after creating four new peers, and issuing a proclamation against robbery on the Borders, was to order the Privy Seal for the patent to Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspere, and others.* We learn from the patent itself that the King's servants were to perform publicly "when the infection of the plague shall decrease." It is clear that the King's servants were not at liberty then to perform publicly. How long the theatres were closed we do not exactly know; but a document is in existence, dated April 9th, 1604, directing the Lord Mayor of London, and Justices of Middlesex and Surrey, "to permit and suffer the three companies of players to the King, Queen, and Prince to exercise their plays in their several and usual houses."† On the 20th of October, 1603, Joan, the wife of the celebrated Edward Alleyn, writes to her husband from London,—"About us the sickness doth cease, and likely more and more, by God's help, to cease. All the companies be come home, and well, for aught we know." Her husband is hawking in the country, and Henslow, his partner, is at the Court. Another letter has been found from Mrs. Alleyn to her husband, which, if rightly interpreted, would show that not only was Shakspere in London at this time, but went about pretty much like other people, calling common things by their common names, giving advice about worldly matters in the way of ordinary folk, and spoken of by the wife of his friend without any wonder or laudation, just as if he had written no Midsummer Night's Dream, or Othello :—"About a weeke a goe there came a youthe, who said he was Mr. Francis Chaloner, who would have borrowed x^{li} to have bought things for . . . . . and said he was known unto you and Mr. Shakespeare of the Globe, who came . . . . said he knewe hym not, onely he herde of hym that he was a roge . . . . . so he was glade we did not lend him the monney. . . . . Richard Johnes [went] to seeke and inquire after the fellow, and said he had lent hym a horse. I feare me he gulled hym, thoughe he gulled not us. The youthe was a prety youthe, and hansome in appayrell: we knowe not what became of hym."‡ The authority of this letter has been thus disputed by Mr. Halliwell :—"It has been stated that Shakspeare was in London in October, 1603, on the strength of a letter printed in Mr. Collier's Memoirs of Alleyn, p. 63; but having carefully examined the original, I am convinced it has been misread. The following is now all that remains," And then Mr. Halliwell prints "all that remains," which does not contain the name of Shakspere at all. Mr. Collier avers that he saw the words which he for the first time published; though the letter was much damaged by the damp, and was falling to pieces.

Whether or not Shakspere was in London on the 20th of October, 1603, it is tolerably clear that the performances at the public theatres were not resumed till

* See the Patent at the end of this Chapter.

† Malone's 'Inquiry,' p. 215. Mr. Collier prints the document in his 'Life of Alleyn,' by which it appears that there had been letters of prohibition previously issued that had reference to the continuance of the plague, and that it still partially continued.

‡ From the Papers in Dulwich College printed in Mr. Collier's 'Memoirs of Edward Alleyn.'

after the order of the 9th of April, 1604. In the Office Books of the Treasurer of the Chamber there is an entry of a payment of thirty-two pounds upon the Council's warrant dated at Hampton Court, February 8th, 1604, "by way of his Majesty's free gift" to Richard Burbage, one of his Majesty's comedians, "for the maintenance and relief of himself and the rest of his company, being prohibited to present any plays publicly in or near London, by reason of great peril that might grow through the extraordinary concourse and assembly of people, to a new increase of the plague, till it shall please God to settle the city in a more perfect health."* But though the public playhouses might be closed through the fear of an "extraordinary concourse and assembly of people," the King, a few months previous, had sent for his own players to a considerable distance to perform before the Court at Wilton. There is an entry in the same Office Book of a payment of thirty pounds to John Hemings "for the pains and expenses of himself and the rest of his company in coming from Mortlake in the county of Surrey unto the Court aforesaid, and there presenting before his Majesty one play on the 2nd of December last, by way of his Majesty's reward."† Wilton was the seat of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, to whom it has been held that Shakspere's Sonnets were addressed. We do not yield our assent to this opinion.‡ But we know from good authority that this nobleman, "the most universally beloved and esteemed of any man of that age," (according to Clarendon,) befriended Shakspere, and that his brother joined him in his acts of kindness. The dedication by John Heminge and Henry Condell, prefixed to the first collected edition of the works of Shakspere, is addressed "To the most

* Cunningham's 'Revels at Court,' p. xxxv. † Id. p. xxxiv.

‡ See our Illustrations of the Sonnets

[William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.]

noble and incomparable pair of brethren, William Earl of Pembroke, and Philip Earl of Montgomery." In the submissive language of poor players to their "singular good lords" they say, "When we value the places your Honours sustain, we cannot but know their dignity greater than to descend to the reading of these trifles; and while we name them trifles, we have deprived ourselves of the defence of our dedication. But since your Lordships have been pleased to think these trifles something, heretofore; and have prosecuted both them, and their author living, with so much favour: we hope that (they out-living him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be executor to his own writings) you will use the like indulgence toward them you have done unto their parent." They subsequently speak of their Lordships liking the several parts of the volume when they were acted; but their author was the object of their personal regard and favour. The call to Wilton of Shakspere's company might probably have arisen from Lord Pembroke's desire to testify this favour. It would appear to be the first theatrical performance before James in England. The favour of the Herberts towards Shakspere thus began early. The testimony of the player-editors would imply that it lasted during the poet's life. The young Earl of Pembroke, upon whom James had just bestowed the Order of

[Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery.]

the Garter, would scarcely, we think, have been well pleased to have welcomed the poet to Wilton who had thus addressed him:—

"How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!"*

* Sonnet xcv.

[Wolsey's Hall, Hampton Court.]

At the Christmas of the same year the King had taken up his residence at Hampton Court. It was here, a little before the period when the Conference on Conformity in Religion was begun, that the Queen and eleven ladies of honour were presenting Daniel's Masque; and Shakspere and his fellows performed six plays before the King and Prince, receiving twenty nobles for each play.* The patronage of the new King to his servants players acting at the Globe seems to have been constant and liberal. To Shakspere this must have been a season of prosperity and of honour. The accession of the King gave him something better. His early friend and patron Southampton was released from a long imprisonment. Enjoying the friendship of Southampton and Pembroke, who were constantly about the King, their tastes may have led the monarch to a just preference of the works of Shakspere before those of any other dramatist. The six plays performed before the King and Prince in the Christmas

* Cunningham's 'Revels at Court,' p. xxxv.

of 1603-4 at Hampton Court, were followed at the succeeding Christmas by performances "at the Banqueting-House at Whitehall," in which the plays of Shakspere were preferred above those of every other competitor. There were eleven performances by the King's players, of which eight were plays of Shakspere. Jonson shared this honour with him in the representation of 'Every One in his Humour,' and 'Every One out of his Humour.' A single play by Heywood, another by Chapman, and a tragedy by an unknown author, completed the list of these revels at Whitehall. It is told, Malone says, "upon authority which there is no reason to doubt, that King James bestowed especial honour upon Shakspere." The story is told in the Advertisement to Lintot's edition of Shakpere's Poems—"That most learned Prince, and great Patron of learning, King James the First, was pleased with his own hand to write an amicable letter to Mr. Shakespeare; which letter, though now lost, remained long in the hands of Sir William Davenant, as a credible person now living can testify." Was the honour bestowed as a reward for the compliment to the King in Macbeth, or was the compliment to the King a tribute of gratitude for the honour?

'The Accompte of the Office of the Reuelles of this whole yeres Charge, in An° 1604,' which was discovered through the zealous industry of Mr. Peter Cunningham, is a most interesting document: first, as giving the names of the plays which were performed at Court, and showing how pre-eminently attractive were those of Shakspere; secondly, as exhibiting the undimmished charm of Shakspere's early plays, such as The Comedy of Errors, and Love's Labour's Lost; and, thirdly, as fixing the date of one of our poets dramas

[Banqueting-House, Whitehall.]

which has generally been assigned to a later period—Measure for Measure. The worthy scribe who keeps the accounts has no very exact acquaintance with "the poets wch mayd the plaies," as he heads the margin of his entries: for he adds another variety to the modes of spelling the name of the greatest of those poets—"Shaxberd." The list gives us no information as to the actors which acted the plays, in addition to the poets which made them. We learn, indeed, from the corresponding accounts in the Office Books of the Treasurer of the Chamber, that on the 21st of January, 1605, sixty pounds were paid "To John Hemynges, one of his Ma^ts^ players, for the paines and expences of himselfe and the reste of his companie, in playinge and presentinge of sixe Enterludes, or plaies, before his Matie." The name of Shakspere is found amongst the names of the performers of Ben Jonson's 'Sejanus,' which was first acted at the Globe in 1603. Burbage, Lowin, Hemings, Condell, Phillipps, Cooke, and Sly had also parts in it. In Jonson's 'Volpone,' brought out at the Globe in 1605, the name of Shakspere does not occur amongst the performers. It has been conjectured, therefore, that he retired from the stage between 1603 and 1605. But, appended to the letter from the Council to the Lord Mayor and other Justices, dated April the 9th, 1604 (which we have already noticed) there has been found the following list of the "King's Company:"*—

"Burbidge
Shakspeare,
Fletcher,
Phillips,
Condle,
Hemminges,
Armyn,
Slye,
Cowley,
Hostler,
Day."

It is thus seen that in the spring of 1604 Shakspere was still an actor, and still held the same place in the company which he held in the patent of the previous year. Lawrence Fletcher, the first named in that patent, has changed places with Burbage. The probable explanation of these changes is, that the shareholders periodically chose one of their number as their chairman, or official head; that Lawrence Fletcher filled this office at Aberdeen in 1601, and at London in 1603, Burbage succeeding to his rank and office in 1604. In the mean time the reputation of Shakspere as a dramatic poet must have secured to him something higher than the fame of an actor, and something better than courtly honours and pecuniary advantages. He must have commanded the respect and admiration of the most distinguished amongst his contemporaries for taste and genius. Few, indeed, comparatively of his plays were printed. The author of Othello, for example, must have been content with the fame which the theatre afforded him. But in 1604, probably to vindicate his reputation from the charge of having, in his mature years, written his Hamlet, such as it appeared in the imperfect edition of 1603, was published 'The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect coppie.' Edition after edition was

* Collier's 'Memoirs of Alleyn,' p. 68.

called for; and assuredly that wonderful tragedy, whose true power can only be adequately felt by repeated study, must have carried its wonderful philosophy into the depths of the heart of many a reader who was no haunter of play-houses, and have most effectually vindicated plays and play-books from the charge of being nothing but "unprofitable pleasures of sin," to be denounced in common with "Love-locks, periwigs, women's curling, powdering and cutting of the hair, bonfires, New-year's gifts, May-games, amorous pastorals, lascivious effeminate music, excessive laughter, luxurious disorderly Christmas keeping, mummeries."* From the hour of the publication of Hamlet, in 1604, to these our days, many a solitary student must have closed that wonderful book with the application to its author of something like the thought that Hamlet himself expresses,—"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty!"

* Prynne's 'Histrio-Mastix.'

NOTE ON THE PATENT TO THE COMPANY ACTING AT THE GLOBE.

MALONE, in his 'Historical Account of the English Stage,' prints the "licence to the company at the Globe, which is found in Rymer's 'Fœdera.'" Mr. Collier, in his 'Annals of the Stage,' publishes the document "from the Privy Seal, preserved in the Chapter House, Westminster, and not from Rymer's 'Fœdera,' whence it has hitherto been inaccurately quoted." The Patent as given in Rymer, and the Privy Seal as given by Mr. Collier, do not differ in the slightest particular, except in the orthography, and the use of capital letters. These matters in Rymer are so wholly arbitrary, that in printing the document we modernize the orthography. Malone adheres to it only partially, and this possibly constitutes the principal charge of inaccuracy brought against him. He has, however, three errors of transcription, but not of any consequence to the sense. At line 9 he has "like other" instead of "others like;" at line 18 "our pleasure" instead of "our said pleasure;" and at the same line, "aiding or assisting" instead of "aiding and assisting."

"Pro Laurentio Fletcher & Willielmo Shakespeare & aliis. A.D. 1603. *Pat.*

"1 Jac. p. 2, m. 4. James by the grace of God, &c., to all justices, mayors, sheriffs, constables, headboroughs, and other our officers and loving subjects, greeting. Know you that we, of our special grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion, have licensed and authorised, and by these presents do license and authorise, these our servants, Laurence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustine Philippes, John Hemings, Henry Condel, William Sly, Robert Armyn, Richard Cowly, and the rest of their associates, freely to use and exercise the art and faculty of playing comedies, tragedies, histories, interludes, morals, pastorals, stage-plays, and such others like as they have already studied, or hereafter shall use or study, as well for the recreation of our loving subjects, as for our solace and pleasure when we shall think good to see them, during our pleasure: and the said comedies, tragedies, histories, interludes, morals, pastorals, stage-plays, and such like, to show and exercise publicly to their best commodity, when the infection of the plague shall decrease, as well within their now usual house, called the Globe, within our county of Surrey, as also within any town-halls or moot-halls, or other convenient places within the liberties and freedom of any other city, university, town, or borough whatsoever within our said realms and dominions. Willing and commanding you and every of you, as you tender our pleasure, not only to permit and suffer them herein, without any your lets, hindrances, or molestations, during our said pleasure, but also to be aiding and assisting to them if any wrong be to them offered, and to allow them such former courtesies as hath been given to men of their place and quality; and also what further favour you shall show to these our servants for our sake, we shall take kindly at your hands. In witness whereof, &c.

"Witness ourself at Westminster, the nineteenth day of May
"Per Breve de privato sigillo."

[The Garden of New Place.]

CHAPTER X.

REST.

We have seen that in the year 1602 Shakspere was investing the gains of his profession in the purchase of property at Stratford. It appears from the original Fines of the Court of King's Bench, preserved in the Chapter-house, that a little before the accession of James, in 1603, Shakspere had also purchased a messuage at Stratford, with barns, gardens, and orchards, of Hercules Underhill, for the sum of sixty pounds.* There can be little doubt that this continued acquisition of property in his native place had reference to the ruling desire of the poet to retire to his quiet fields and the placid intercourse of society at Stratford, out of the turmoil of his professional life and the excitement of the

* The document was first published in Mr. Collier's 'New Facts.'

companionship of the gay and the brilliant. And yet it appears highly probable that he was encouraged, at this very period, through the favour of those who rightly estimated his merit, to apply for an office which would have brought him even more closely in connexion with the Court. As one of the King's servants he received the small annual fee of three pounds six and eight-pence.

On the 30th of January, 1604, Samuel Daniel was appointed by letters patent to an office which, though not so called, was in fact that of Master of the Queen's Revels. In a letter from Daniel to Lord Ellesmere, he expresses his thanks for a "new, great, and unlooked for favour. . . . . I shall now be able to live free from those cares and troubles that hitherto have been my continual and wearisome companions. . . . . I cannot but know that I am less deserving than some that sued by other of the nobility unto her Majesty for this room: if M. Drayton, my good friend, had been chosen, I should not have murmured, for sure I am he would have filled it most excellently; but it seemeth to mine humble judgment that one who is the author of plays now daily presented on the public stages of London, and the possessor of no small gains, and moreover himself an actor in the King's Company of Comedians, could not with reason pretend to be Master of the Queen's Majesty's Revels, forasmuch as he would sometimes be asked to approve and allow of his own writings. Therefore he, and more of like quality, cannot justly be disappointed because through your honour's gracious interposition the chance was haply mine."* It appears highly probable that Shakspere was pointed at as the author of popular plays, the possessor of no small gains, the actor in the King's company. It is not impossible that Shakspere looked to this appointment as a compensation for his retirement from the profession of an actor, retaining his interest, however, as a theatrical proprietor. Be that as it may, he still carried forward his ruling purpose of the acquisition of property at Stratford. In 1605 he accomplished a purchase which required a larger outlay than any previous investment. On the 24th of July, in the third year of James, a conveyance was made by Ralph Huband, Esq., to William Shakspere, gentleman, of a moiety of a lease of the great and small tithes of Stratford, for the remainder of a term of ninety-two years, and the amount of the purchase was four hundred and forty pounds. There can be little doubt that he was the cultivator of his own land, availing himself of the assistance of his brother Gilbert, and, in an earlier period, probably of his father. An account in 1597 of the stock of malt in the borough of Stratford, is said to exhibit ten quarters in the possession of William Shakspere, of Chapel Street Ward. New Place was situated in Chapel Street. The purchase of a moiety of the tithes of so large a parish as Stratford might require extensive arrangements for their collection. Tithes in those days were more frequently collected in kind than by a *modus*. But even if a modus was taken, it would require a knowledge of the value of agricultural produce to farm the tithes with advantage.† But before the date of this pur-

* This letter, found amongst the Egerton Papers, is published by Mr. Collier in his 'New Facts.'

† There is a document dated the 28th of October, 1614, in which William Replingham cove-

chase it is perfectly clear that William Shakspere was in the exercise of the trading part of a farmer's business. He bought the hundred and seven acres of land of John and William Combe in May, 1602. In 1604 a declaration was entered in the Borough Court of Stratford, on a plea of debt, William Shakspere against Philip Rogers, for the sum of thirty-five shillings and ten-pence, for corn delivered. The precept was issued in the usual form upon this declaration, the delivery of the corn being stated to have taken place at several times in the first and second years of James. There cannot be more distinct evidence that William Shakspere, at the very period when his dramas were calling forth the rapturous applause of the new Sovereign and his Court, and when he himself, as it would seem, was ambitious of a courtly office, did not disdain to pursue the humble though honourable occupation of a farmer in Stratford, and to exercise his just rites of property in connexion with that occupation. We must believe that he looked forward to the calm and healthful employment of the evening of his days, as a tiller of the land which his father had tilled before him, at the same time working out noble plans of poetical employment in his comparative leisure, as the best scheme of life in his declining years. The exact period when he commenced the complete realization of these plans is somewhat doubtful. He had probably ceased to appear as an actor before 1605.* If the date 1608 be correctly assigned to a letter held to be written by Lord Southampton,† it is clear that Shakspere was not then an actor, for he is there described as "till *of late* an actor of good account in the company, *now* a sharer in the same." His partial freedom from his professional labours certainly preceded his final settlement at Stratford.

In the conveyance by the Combes to Shakspere in 1602, he is designated as William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon. The same designation holds in subsequent legal documents connected with Stratford; but there is no doubt that, at the period of the conveyance from the Combes, he was an actor in the company performing at the Blackfriars and at the Globe; and in tracing therefore the "whereabout" of Shakspere, from the imperfect records which remain to us, we have assumed that where the fellows of Shakspere are to be found, there is he to be also located. But in the belief that before 1608 he had ceased to be an actor, we are not required to assume that he was so constantly with his company as before that partial retirement. His interest would no doubt require his occasional presence with them, for he continued to be a considerable proprietor in their lucrative concerns. That prudence and careful management which could alone have enabled him to realize a large property out of his professional pursuits, and at the same time not to dissipate it by his agricultural occupations, appears to have been founded upon an arrangement by which he secured the assistance of his family, and at the same time made a provision for them. We have seen that in 1602 his brother Gilbert was his representative

nants with William Shakspere to make recompense for any loss and hindrance, upon arbitration, for and in respect to the increasing value of tithes.

* See Chapter IX., p. 478.

† See Note at the end of this Chapter.

at Stratford. Richard, who was ten years his junior, and who, dying a year before him, was buried at Stratford, would also appear to have been resident there. His youngest brother Edmund, sixteen years his junior, was, there can be little question, associated with him in the theatre; and he probably looked to him to attend to the management of his property in London, after he retired from any active attention to its conduct. But Edmund died early. He lived in the parish of St. Saviour's, in all probability at his brother's house in the liberty of the Clink; an the register of burials of that parish has the following record:—"1607, December 31st, Edmond Shakespeare, a player, in the church."* The death of his brother might probably have had a considerable influence upon the habits of his life, and might have induced him to dispose of all his theatrical property, as there is reason to believe he did, several years before his death. The value of a portion of this property has been ascertained, as far as it can be, upon an estimate for its sale; and by this estimate the amount of his portion, as compared with that of his co-proprietors, is distinctly shown. The original establishment of the theatre at the Blackfriars in 1574 was in opposition to the attempt of the Corporation of London to subject the players to harsh restrictions. Within the city the authority of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen appears to have been powerful enough to resist the protection which was given to the players by the Court. Burbage therefore built his theatre at a convenient place, just out of the jurisdiction of the city.† In 1579 the Corporation were defeated in some attempt to interfere with the players at the Blackfriars Theatre, by a peremptory order in Council that they should not be restrained nor in anywise molested in the exercise of their quality. The players at a subsequent period occasionally exercised freedoms towards the dignitaries of the city, not so much in the regular drama, as in those merriments or jigs with which the comic performers amused the groundlings. In 1605 the worshipful magistrates took this freedom so greatly to heart that they brought the matter before the Privy Council:—"Whereas Kemp, Armin, and others, players at the Blackfriars, have again not forborne to bring upon their stage one or more of the worshipful Aldermen of the City of London, to their great scandal and to the lessening of their authority; the Lords of the right honourable the Privy Council are besought to call the said players before them and to inquire into the same, that order may be taken to remedy the abuse, either by putting down or removing the said theatre."‡ It was probably with reference to such satirizers, often extemporal, whose licentiousness dates back as far as the days of Tarleton, that Hamlet said, "After your death you had better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you lived." Nothing was done by the Privy Council in consequence of the complaint of 1605; but it appears that in 1608 the question of the jurisdiction of the City in the Blackfriars, and especially with reference to the playhouse, was again brought before Lord Ellesmere. The proprietors of the theatre remained in undisturbed possession. Out of this attempt a negociation appears to have arisen for the purchase of the property by the City; for amongst the documents connected

* See p. 222. † See p. 301. ‡ Collier's 'New Facts.'

with this attempt of the Corporation is found a paper headed, "For avoiding of the playhouse in the precinct of the Blackfriars." The document states, in conclusion, that "in the whole it will cost the Lord Mayor and the citizens at the least 7000*l.*" Richard Burbage claims 1000*l.* for the fee, and for his four shares 933*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* Laz. Fletcher owns three shares, which he rates at 700*l.*, that is, at seven years' purchase. "W. Shakespeare asketh for the wardrobe and properties of the same playhouse 500^{li}, and for his four shares, the same as his fellowes Burbidge and Fletcher, viz. 933^{li} 6^{s} 8^{d}." Heminge and Condell have each two shares, Taylor and Lowin each a share and a half; four more players each a half share; which they all value at the same rate. The hired men of the company also claim recompense for their loss; "and the widows and orphans of players who are paid by the sharers at divers rates and proportions." * It thus appears that, next to Richard Burbage, Shakspere was the largest proprietor in the theatre; that Burbage was the exclusive owner of the real property, and Shakspere of the personal. We see that Fletcher is the next largest shareholder. Fletcher's position, both at Aberdeen and in the licence of 1603, did not depend, we conclude, upon the amount of his proprietary interest. In the same way that we find in the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber payments to Heminge, when he was a holder of a smaller number of shares than Burbage, or Shakspere, or Fletcher (he probably being then paid as the man of business representing the company), so Fletcher in 1601 and 1603 stood at their head by some choice independent of his proprietorship. There is a precision in Fletcher's valuation of his shares which shows that he possessed the qualities necessary for representing the pecuniary interests of his fellows:—"Three shares which he rateth at 700*l.*, that is at seven years' purchase for each share, or thirty-three pounds six shillings and eight-pence one year with another." Shakspere founds the valuation of his share upon the valuation of Burbage and Fletcher. If the valuation be correct, Shakspere's annual income derived from his shares in the Blackfriars alone, was 133*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* His wardrobe and properties, being perishable matters, were probably valued at five years' purchase, giving him an additional income of 100*l.* This income was derived from the Blackfriars alone. His property in the Globe Theatre was in all likelihood quite equal. He would, besides, derive additional advantages as the author of new plays. With a professional income, then, of 400*l.* or 500*l.* per annum, which may be held to be equal to six times the amount in our present money, it is evident that Shakspere possessed the means not only of a liberal expenditure at his houses in London and at Stratford, but from the same source was enabled to realize considerable sums, which he invested in real property in his native place. We can trace his purchase of his "capital messuage" in 1597; of his hundred and seven acres of land and of a tenement in 1602; of another tenement in 1603; and of a moiety of the tithes of Stratford in 1605. He had previously invested capital in the building of the Globe and the repairs of the Blackfriars. His unprofessional purchases during a period of

* This valuable document was discovered by Mr. Collier, and published by him in his 'New Facts.'

ten years establish the fact that he improved his worldly advantages with that rare good sense which formed so striking a feature in the whole character of his mind. That he acquired nothing by unfair dealings with his fellow-labourers, authors or actors, we may well believe, even without the testimony of Henry Chettle in the early period of his career, that "divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing," and of Heminge and Condell after his death, who speak in their Dedication with deep reverence of "so worthy a friend and fellow." It would seem, however, that his prosperity was envied. Mr. Collier supposes that a passage in an anonymous tract called 'Ratsey's Ghost,' applies to Shakspere: "When thou feelest thy purse well lined, buy thee some place of lordship in the country, that, growing weary of playing, thy money may there bring thee to high dignity and reputation. . . . . for, I have heard indeed of some that have gone to London very meanly, and have come in time to be exceeding wealthy." If the application be correct, we still cannot hold with Mr. Collier that the "gone to London very meanly" of this writer implies that "Shakespeare came to London a penniless fugitive."* Mr. Collier has shown that in 1589 Shakspere was a shareholder in the Blackfriars, taking precedence of the most popular actors, Kempe and Armin, and also of William Jonson, a shareholder of fifteen years' standing. If Shakspere won this position out of the depths of that poverty which it is the fashion to surround him with, absolutely without a tittle of evidence, the success of the first four or five years of his professional career must have been greater than that of any subsequent period. All the records of Shakspere's professional life, and the results of his success as exhibited in the accession of property, indicate, on the contrary, a steady and regular advance. They show us that perseverance and industry were as much the characteristics of the man as the greatness of his genius; that he held with constancy to the course of life which he had early adopted; that year by year it afforded him increased competence and wealth; and that if he had the rare privilege of pursuing an occupation which called forth the highest exercise of his powers, rendering it in every essential a pleasurable occupation, he despised not the means by which he had risen: he lived in a free and genial intercourse with his professional brethren, and to the last they were his friends and fellows.

Aubrey says of Shakspere, "He was wont to go to his native country once a-year." This statement, which there is no reason to disbelieve, has reference to the period when Shakspere was engaged as an actor. There is another account of Shakspere's mode of life, which does not contradict Aubrey, but brings down his information to a later period. In the 'Diary of the Rev. John Ward, Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon,' the manuscript of which was discovered in the library of the Medical Society of London, we find the following curious record of Shakspere's later years:—"I have heard that Mr. Shakspeare was a natural wit, without any art at all; hee frequented the plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford, and supplied the stage with two plays every year, and for itt had an allowance so large, that hee spent att the

* 'New Facts,' p. 31.

rate of 1000*l.* a-year, as I have heard." The Diary of John Ward extends from 1648 to 1679; and it is in many respects interesting, from the circumstance that he united the practice of medicine to the performance of his duties as a parish priest. Amidst the scanty rural population such a combination was not unusual, the bishop of the diocese granting a licence to an incumbent to practise medicine in the diocese where he dwelt. Upon the removal from the vicarage of Stratford-upon-Avon of Alexander Beane, who had held the living from 1648 to the Restoration, John Ward, A.M., was appointed his successor in 1662.* It is evident that, although forty-six years had elapsed since the death of Shakspere, his memory was the leading association with Stratford-upon-Avon. After noticing that Shakspere had two daughters, we find the entry presented above. It is just possible that the new vicar of Stratford might have seen Shakspere's younger daughter Judith, who was born in 1585, and, having married Thomas Quiney in 1616, lived to the age of seventy-seven, having been buried on the 9th of February, 1662. The descendants of Shakspere's family and of his friends surrounded the worthy vicar on every side; and he appears to have thought it absolutely necessary to acquire such a knowledge of the productions of the great poet as might qualify him to speak of them in general society:—"Remember to peruse Shakespeare's plays, and bee much versed in them, that I may not bee ignorant in that matter." The honest vicar was not quite certain whether the fame of Shakspere was only a provincial one, for he adds—"Whether Dr. Heylin does well, in reckoning up the dramatick poets which have been famous in England, to omit Shakespeare?"† The good man is not altogether to be blamed for having previously to 1662 been "ignorant" of Shakspere's plays. He was only thirty-three years of age; and his youth had been passed in the stormy period when the Puritans had well nigh banished all literature, and especially dramatic literature, from the minds of the people, in their intolerant proscription of all pleasure and recreation. At any rate we may accept the statements of the good vicar as founded upon the recollections of those with whom he was associated in 1662. It is wholly consistent with what we otherwise know of Shakspere's life, that "He frequented the plays all his younger time." It is equally consistent that he "in his elder days lived at Stratford." There is nothing improbable in the belief that he "supplied the stage with two plays every year." The last clause of the sentence is somewhat startling:—"And for it had an allowance so large, that he spent at the rate of 1000*l.* a-year, as I have heard." And yet the assertion must not be considered wholly an exaggeration. "He spent at the rate of 1000*l.* a-year," must mean the rate of the time when Mr. Ward is writing. During the half century which had preceded the Restoration, there had been a more important decrease in the value of money than had even taken place in the reign of Elizabeth. During that reign the prices of all commodities were constantly rising; but after the reduction of the legal rate of interest from ten per cent. to eight in 1624, and from eight to six in 1651, the change was still more remarkable. Sir

* See the list of incumbents in Wheler's 'History of Stratford-upon-Avon. 82.

† See 'Diary,' &c., 1839, p. 183.

Josias Child, in 1688, says that five hundred pounds with a daughter, sixty years before, was esteemed a larger portion than two thousand pounds now. It would appear, therefore, that the thousand a-year in 1662 was not more than one-third of the amount in 1612: and this sum, from 300*l.* to 400*l.*, was, as near as may be, the amount which Shakspere appears to have derived from his theatrical property. In all probability he held that property during the greater part of the period when he "supplied the stage with two plays every year;" and this indirect remuneration for his poetical labours might readily have been mistaken, fifty years afterwards, as "an allowance so large" for authorship that the good vicar records it as a memorable thing.

It is established that Othello was performed in 1602; Hamlet, greatly enlarged, was published in 1604; Measure for Measure was acted before the Court on St. Stephen's night in the same year. If we place Shakspere's partial retirement from his professional duties about this period, and regard the plays whose dates up to this point have not been fixed by any authentic record, or satisfactory combination of circumstances, we have abundant work in reserve for the great poet in the maturity of his intellect. Lear, Macbeth, Timon of Athens, Troilus and Cressida, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest, Henry VIII., Coriolanus, Julius Cæsar, Antony and Cleopatra, eleven of the noblest productions of the human intellect, so varied in their character,—the deepest passion, the profoundest philosophy, the wildest romance, the most comprehensive history,—what a glorious labour to fill the nine or ten remaining years of the life of the man who had left his native fields twenty years before to seek for advancement in doubtful and perilous paths,—in a profession which was denounced by some and despised by others,—amongst companions full of genius and learning, but who had perished early in their pride and their self-abandonment! And he returns wealthy and honoured to the bosom of those who are dearest to him—his wife and daughters, his mother, his sisters and brothers. The companions of his boyhood are all around him. They have been useful members of society in their native place. He has constantly kept up his intercourse with them. They have looked to him for assistance in their difficulties. He is come to be one of them, to dwell wholly amongst them, to take a deeper interest in their pleasures and in their cares, to receive their sympathy. He is come to walk amidst his own fields, to till them, to sell their produce. His labour will be his recreation. In the activity of his body will the energy of his intellect find its support and its rest. His nature is eminently fitted for action as well as contemplation. Were it otherwise, he would have "bad dreams," like his own Hamlet. Morbid thoughts may have come over him "like a passing cloud;" but from this time his mind will be eminently healthful. The imagination and the reason henceforth will be wonderfully balanced. Much of this belongs to the progressive character of his understanding; something to his favourable position.

To a mind which habitually dwells amongst high thoughts,—familiar with the greatness of the past, the littleness of the present, and the vastness of the future,—the petty jealousies, the envies, the heart-burnings, that have ever

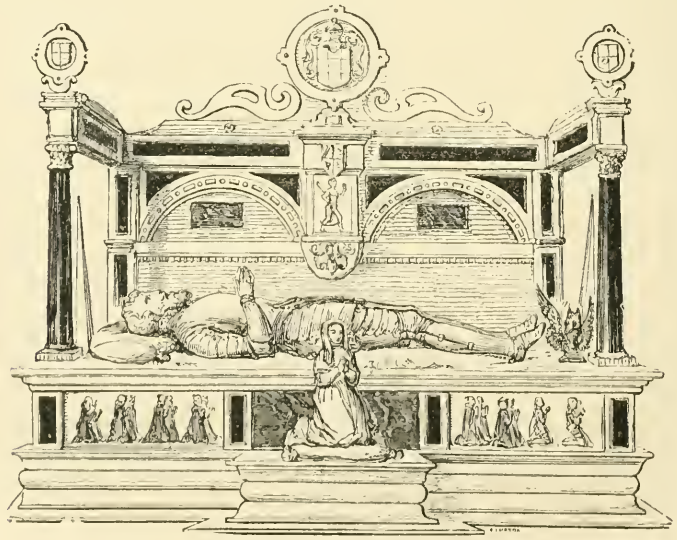
belonged to provincial society can only present themselves under the aspect of the ludicrous. William Shakspere was no doubt pointed out by some of his neighbours as the rich player that had "gone to London very meanly." It appears to us that we can trace the workings of this jealousy in a small matter which has hitherto been viewed somewhat differently. The father and mother of Shakspere were of good family,—a circumstance more regarded in those days than wealth. We never have attempted to show that John Shakspere was a wealthy man; but we have contended that the evidence by which it has been sought to prove that he was "steeped up to the very lips in poverty" did not support the allegation.* On the grant of arms to John Shakspere made in 1596, which is preserved in the Herald's College, † there is a memorandum which appears to have been made as an explanation of the circumstances connected with the grant. It recites that John Shakspere showed a previous patent; that he had been chief officer of Stratford; "that he hath lands and tenements, of good wealth and substance, five hundred pounds; that he married a daughter and heir of Arden, a gentleman of worship." Malone, who published this document, holds that the assertion that he was worth five hundred pounds is incompatible with the averment of a bill in Chancery, filed by John Shakspere and Mary his wife, against John Lamberte, who had foreclosed upon the estate of Asbies, mortgaged to his father in 1578. The concluding petition of this bill in Chancery says:—"And for that also the said John Lamberte is of great wealth and ability, and well friended and allied amongst gentlemen and freeholders of the country in the said county of Warwick, where he dwelleth, and your said orators are of small wealth and very few friends and alliance in the said county." Malone calls this "the confession of our poet's father himself" of his poverty, and even of his insolvency. The averments of the petition and the replication afford a proof to the contrary; for these documents state that the mortgagee wrongfully held possession of the premises, although the mortgage-money was tendered in 1580. The complainant says that he is a man of small wealth,—the man against whom he complains is one of great wealth. The possessor of five hundred pounds was not, even in those days, a man of great wealth; but it was a reason, according to the heralds, for such a grant of arms as belonged to a gentleman. But he had "very few friends and alliance in the said county." This was a motive probably for some one of higher wealth and greater friends making an attempt to disturb the honours which the heralds had confirmed to John Shakspere. It appears that some charges were made against Garter and Clarencieux, Kings at Arms (which offices were then held by Dethick and Camden), that they had wrongfully given arms to certain persons, twenty-three in number. The answer of Garter and Clarencieux, preserved in the Herald's College, was presented on the 10th of May, 1602; and it appears that John Shakspere was one of those named in the "libellous scroll," as the heralds call it. Their answer as regards Shakspere is as follows: "*Shakespere.*—It may as well be said that Hareley, who beareth gould a bend between two cotizes sables, and all other that [bear] or and argent

* See p. 108.

† See p. 6.

a bend sables, usurpe the coat of Lo. Manley. As for the speare in bend, [it] is a patible difference; and the person to whom it was granted hath borne magestracy, and was justice of peace at Stratford-upon-Avon. He married the daughter and heire of Arderne, and was able to maintain that estate." The information or "libellous scroll," was heard before Lord Howard and others on the 1st of May, 1602. At that time John Shakspere had been dead six months. The answer of the heralds points to the position of the person to whom the arms were granted in 1599, when the shield of Shakspere was impaled with the ancient arms of Arden of Wellingcote.* In May, 1602, William Shakspere bore these joint arms of his father and mother by virtue of the grant of 1599; and against him, therefore, was the "libellous scroll" directed. He had bought a "place of lordship" in the county of Warwick; he was written down in all indentures, gentleman and *generosus;* he had a new coat of arms, it is true, but he claimed it through a gentle ancestry. Was there any one in his immediate neighbourhood, a rich and proud man, who looked upon the acquisition of lands and houses by the poor player with a self-important jealousy? Sir Thomas Lucy—he who possessed Charlcote in the days of William Shakspere's youth—was dead. He died on the 6th of July, 1600; and it is probable that he who had looked with reverence upon the worthy knight when, as a boy, he was unfamiliar with greatness, might have dropped a tear upon his grave in the parish church of Charlcote. But another Sir Thomas Lucy, who had just succeeded to large possessions, might have thought it necessary to make an attempt to lower, in the eyes of his neighbours, the importance of the presumptuous man who, being nothing but an actor and a poet, had presumed to write himself gentleman. In the first copy of The Merry Wives of Windsor there is

* See p. 7.



[Monument of Sir Thomas Lucy.]

not a word about the dignities of Justice Shallow, his old coat, or his quarters. Those passages first appeared in the folio of 1623. They probably existed when the play was acted before James in November, 1604 :—

"*Shallow.* Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Star-chamber matter of it: if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire.

Slender. In the county of Gloster, justice of peace, and *coram*.

Shal. Ay, cousin Slender, and *cust-alorum*.

Slen. Ay, and *ratolorum* too; and a gentleman born, master parson; who writes himself *armigero;* in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, armigero.

Shal. Ay, that I do: and have done any time these three hundred years.

Slen. All his successors, gone before him, have done't; and all his ancestors, that come after him, may: they may give the dozen white luces in their coat.

Shal. It is an old coat.

Evans. The dozen white louses do become an old coat well; it agrees well, passant it is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love.

Shal. The luce is the fresh fish; the salt fish is an old coat."

The allusion of the dozen white luces cannot be mistaken. "Three luces hauriant, argent," are the arms of the Lucys. The luce is a pike—"the fresh fish,"—but the pike of the Lucys, as shown in their arms in the church window of Charlcote,* are *hauriant*, springing,—the heraldic term applied to fish; *saltant* being the term applied to quadrupeds in the same attitude. This is the *salt* or saltant fish of Shallow. The whole passage is a playful satire upon the solemn pretensions of one with three hundred years of ancestry boasting of his "old coat." The "dozen white louses" (the vulgarism covered by the Welshman's pronunciation) points the application of the satire with a personality which, coming from one whose habitual practice was never to ridicule classes or individuals, shows that it was a smart return for some insult or injury. The old coat, we believe, could not endure the neighbourhood of the new coat. The "dozen white luces" could not leap in the same atmosphere in which the "spear in bend" presumed to dwell. We can understand the ridicule of the old coat in the second copy of The Merry Wives of Windsor, without connecting it with the absurd story of the prosecution for deer-stealing by the elder Sir Thomas Lucy. The ballad attributed to Shakspere is clearly a modern forgery, founded upon the passage in The Merry Wives of Windsor.† If the ridicule of the "old coat" had been intended to mark Shakspere's sense of early injuries, it would have appeared in the first copy of that play, when the feeling which prompted the satire was strong, because the offence was recent. It finds a place in the enlarged copy of that comedy, produced, there can be little doubt, at a period when some one had prompted an attack upon the validity of the armorial honours which were granted to his father; attacking himself, in all likelihood, in the insolent spirit of an aristocratic provinciality. The revenge is enduring; the subject of the revenge is forgotten. The antiquarian microscope has discovered that, in 1602, Sir Thomas Lucy (not the same who punished Shakspere "for stealing his deer," because *he* died in 1600‡) sent Sir Thomas

* See Dugdale's 'Warwickshire,' p. 401. † See p. 230.

‡ See Egerton Papers, published by the Camden Society, p. 350, in which this fact is overlooked

Egerton the present of a buck, on the very occasion when the Othello of Shakspere was presented before Queen Elizabeth at Harefield. Whatever might be the comparative honours of William Shakspere and the Knight of Charlcote at the beginning of the seventeenth century, this fact furnishes a precise estimate of their relative importance for all future times. Posterity has settled the debate between the new coat and the old coat by a very summary arbitrement.

With the exception of this piece of ridicule in The Merry Wives of Windsor, we know not of a single personality which can be alleged against Shakspere, in an age when his dramatic contemporaries, especially, bespattered their rivals and their enemies as fiercely as any modern paragraph writer. But vulgar opinion, which is too apt most easily to recognise the power of talent in its ability to inflict pain—which would scarcely appreciate the sentiment,

> "O, it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant"—

has assigned to Shakspere a performance which has the quality, extraordinary as regards himself, of possessing scurrility without wit. It is something lower in the moral scale even than the fabricated ballad upon Sir Thomas Lucy; for it exhibits a wanton and unprovoked outrage upon an unoffending neighbour, in the hour of convivial intercourse. Rowe tells the story as if he thought he were doing honour to the genius of the man whose good qualities he is at the same moment recording: "The latter part of his life was spent, as all men of good sense will wish theirs may be—in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends. He had the good fortune to gather an estate equal to his occasion, and in that, to his wish; and is said to have spent some years before his death at his native Stratford. His pleasurable wit and good nature engaged him in the acquaintance, and entitled him to the friendship, of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. Amongst them, it is a story still remembered in that country that he had a particular intimacy with Mr. Combe, an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury: it happened, that in a pleasant conversation amongst their common friends, Mr. Combe told Shakspeare, in a laughing manner, that he fancied he intended to write his epitaph, if he happened to outlive him, and since he could not know what might be said of him when he was dead, he desired it might be done immediately, upon which Shakspeare gave him these four lines:—

> Ten in the hundred lies here ingrav'd;
> 'T is a hundred to ten his soul is not sav'd:
> If any man ask, Who lies in this tomb?
> Oh! Oh! quoth the devil, 't is my John-a-Combe.'

But the sharpness of the satire is said to have stung the man so severely, that he never forgave it." Certainly this is an extraordinary illustration of Shakspere's "pleasurable wit and good nature"—of those qualities which won for him the name of the "gentle Shakspere;" which made Jonson, stern enough to most men, proclaim—"He was honest, and of an open and free nature," and that his "mind and manners" were reflected in his "well-turned and true-

filed lines." John-a-Combe never forgave the sharpness of the satire! And yet he bequeathed by his last will "To Mr. William Shakspere, five pounds." Aubrey tells the story with a difference:—"One time, as he was at the tavern at Stratford-upon-Avon, one Combes, an old rich usurer, was to be buryed, he makes there this extemporary epitaph;" and then he gives the lines with a variation, in which "vows" rhymes to "allows," instead of "sav'd" to "ingrav'd."

Of course, following out this second story, the family of John Combe resented the insult to the memory of their parent, who died in 1614; and yet an intimacy subsisted between them even till the death of Shakspere, for in his own will he bequeaths to the son of the usurer a remarkable token of personal regard, the badge of a gentleman:—"To Mr. Thomas Combe my sword." The whole story is a fabrication. Ten in the hundred was the old name of opprobrium for one who lent money. To receive interest at all was called usury. "That ten in the hundred was gone to the devil," was an old joke, that shaped itself into epigrams long before the death of John Combe; and in the 'Remains of Richard Braithwaite,' printed in 1618, we have the very epitaph assigned to Shakspere, with a third set of variations, given as a notable production of this voluminous writer: "Upon one John Combe, of Stratford-upon-Avon, a notable usurer, fastened upon a Tombe that he had caused to be built in his Lifetime." The lie direct is given by the will of John Combe to this third version of the lines against him; for it directs that a convenient tomb shall be erected one year after his decease. John Combe was the neighbour and without doubt the friend of Shakspere. His house was within a short distance of New Place, being upon the site of the ancient College, and constructed in part out of the offices of that monastic establishment.* It was of John Combe and his

* This fine old building, we regret to say, was taken down in 1799.

[The College.]

[Ancient Hall in the College.]

brother that Shakspere made a large purchase of land in 1602. The better tradition survived the memory of Rowe's and Aubrey's epitaph; and before the mansion was pulled down, the people of Stratford delighted to look upon the Hall where John Combe had listened to the "very ready and pleasant smooth wit" * of his friend "the immortal Shakspere," as the good folks of Stratford always term their poet. It was here that the neighbours would talk of "pippins" of their "own graffing,"—of a fine "dish of leathercoats,"—"how a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair?"—"how a score of ewes now?" The poet had brought with him from London a few of the new mulberry plants. There was one at New Place, and one at the College. Which throve best? Should they ever raise silk-worms upon the leaves, and give a new manufacture to Stratford? The King was sanguine about the success of his mulberry-tree project, for he procured plants from France, and dispersed them through the kingdom; but they doubted.† The poet planted his mulberry-tree for the ornament

* Aubrey.

† See Howe's Continuation of Stow's 'Chronicle,' p. 894.

of his "curious knotted garden;" little dreaming that his very fame in future times should accelerate its fall.

It would be something if we could now form an exact notion of the house in which Shakspere lived; of its external appearance, its domestic arrangements. Dugdale, speaking of Sir Hugh Clopton, who built the bridge at Stratford and repaired the chapel, says—"On the north side of this chapel was a fair house built of brick and timber, by the said Hugh, wherein he lived in his later days, and died." This was nearly a century before Shakspere bought the "fair house," which, in the will of Sir Hugh Clopton, is called "the great house." Theobald says that Shakspere, "having repaired and modelled it to his own mind, changed the name to New Place." Malone holds that this is an error:—"I find from ancient documents that it was called New Place as early at least as 1565." The great house, having been sold out of the Clopton family, was purchased by Shakspere of William Underhill, Esq. Shakespere by his will left it to his daughter, Mrs. Hall, with remainder to her heirs male, or, in default, to her daughter Elizabeth and her heirs male, or the heirs male of his daughter Judith. Mrs. Hall died in 1649; surviving her husband fourteen years. There is little doubt that she occupied the house when Queen Henrietta Maria, in 1643, coming to Stratford in royal state with a large army, resided for three weeks under this roof. The property descended to her daughter Elizabeth, first married to Mr. Thomas Nash and afterwards to Sir Thomas Barnard. She dying without issue, New Place was sold in 1675, and was ultimately repurchased by the Clopton family. Sir Hugh Clopton, in the middle of the eighteenth century, resided there. The learned knight, according to some of the local historians, thoroughly repaired and beautified the place, and built a modern front to it. But it is evident, from recent excavations, that he did much more. Malone says that he "pulled down our poet's house, and built one more elegant on the same spot." After the death of Sir Hugh, in 1751, it was sold to the Rev. Francis Gastrell, in 1753.

The total destruction of New Place in 1757, by its new possessor, is difficult to account for upon any ordinary principles of action. Malone thus relates the story:—"The Rev. Mr. Gastrell, a man of large fortune, resided in it but a few years, in consequence of a disagreement with the inhabitants of Stratford. Every house in that town that is let or valued at more than 40*s.* a-year is assessed by the overseers, according to its worth and the ability of the occupier, to pay a monthly rate toward the maintenance of the poor. As Mr. Gastrell resided part of the year at Lichfield, he thought he was assessed too highly; but being very properly compelled by the magistrates of Stratford to pay the whole of what was levied on him, on the principle that his house was occupied by his servants in his absence, he peevishly declared that *that* house should never be assessed again; and soon afterwards pulled it down, sold the materials, and left the town. Wishing, as it should seem, to be 'damn'd to everlasting fame,' he had some time before cut down Shakspeare's celebrated mulberry-tree, to save himself the trouble of showing it to those whose admiration of our great poet led them to visit the poetic ground on which it

stood." The cutting down of the mulberry-tree seems to have been regarded as a great offence in Mr. Gastrell's own generation. His wife was a sister of Johnson's correspondent, Mrs. Aston. After the death of Mr. Gastrell, his widow resided at Lichfield; and in 1776, Boswell, in company with Johnson, dined with the sisters. Boswell on this occasion says—"I was not informed, till afterwards, that Mrs. Gastrell's husband was the clergyman who, while he lived at Stratford-upon-Avon, with Gothic barbarity cut down Shakspeare's mulberry-tree, and, as Dr. Johnson told me, did it to vex his neighbours. His lady, I have reason to believe on the same authority, participated in the guilt of what the enthusiasts of our immortal bard deem almost a species of sacrilege." The mulberry-tree was cut down in 1756; was sold for firewood; and the bulk of it was purchased by a Mr. Thomas Sharp, of Stratford-upon-Avon, clock and watch maker, who made a solemn affidavit, some years afterwards, that out of a sincere veneration for the memory of its celebrated planter he had the greater part of it conveyed to his own premises, and worked it into curious toys and useful articles. The destruction of the mulberry-tree, which the previous possessor of New Place used to show with pride and veneration, enraged the people of Stratford; and Mr. Wheler tells us that he remembers to have heard his father say that, when a boy, he assisted in the revenge of breaking the reverend destroyer's windows. The hostilities were put an end to by the Rev. Mr. Gastrell quitting Stratford in 1757; and, upon the principle of doing what he liked with his own, pulling the house to the ground.

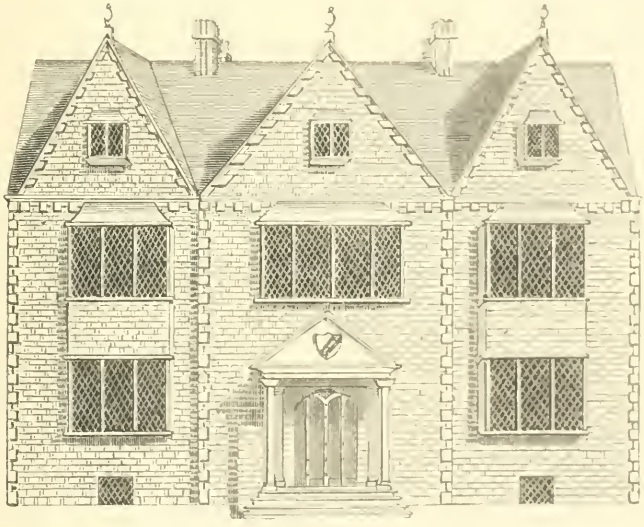
We may charitably believe, not only that this reverend person had no enthusiastic reverence for the spot hallowed by associations with the memory of Shakspere; but that he thought nothing of Shakspere in the whole course of his proceedings. He bought a house, and paid for it. He wished to enjoy it in quiet. People with whom he could not sympathise intruded upon him to see the gardens and the house. In the gardens was a noble mulberry-tree. Tradition said it was planted by Shakspere; and the professional enthusiasts of Shakspere, the Garricks and the Macklins, had sat under its shade, during the occupation of one who felt that there was a real honour in the ownership of such a place. The Rev. Mr. Gastrell wanted the house and the gardens to himself. He had that strong notion of the exclusive rights of property which belongs to most Englishmen, and especially to ignorant Englishmen. Mr. Gastrell was an ignorant man, though a clergyman. We have seen his diary, written upon a visit to Scotland three years after the pulling down of New Place. His journey was connected with some electioneering intrigues in the Scotch boroughs. He is a stranger in Scotland, and he goes into some of its most romantic districts. The scenery makes no impression upon him, as may be imagined; but he is scandalized beyond measure when he meets with a bad dinner, and a rough lodging. He has just literature enough to know the name of Shakspere; but in passing through Forres and Glamis he has not the slightest association with Shakspere's Macbeth. A Captain Gordon informs his vacant mind upon some abstruse subjects, as to which we have the following record:—"He assures me that the Duncan murdered at Forres was the same person that Shakspeare writes of." There scarcely requires any further

evidence of the prosaic character of his mind; and if there be some truth in the axiom of Shakspere, that

> "The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,"

we hold, upon the same principle, that the man who speaks in this literal way of the "person that Shakspere writes of," was a fit man to root up Shakspere's mulberry-tree; pull down the house which had some associations with the more ancient structure in which the author of some of the greatest productions of the human intellect had lived and died; and feel not the slightest regret in abandoning the gardens which the matchless man had cultivated.

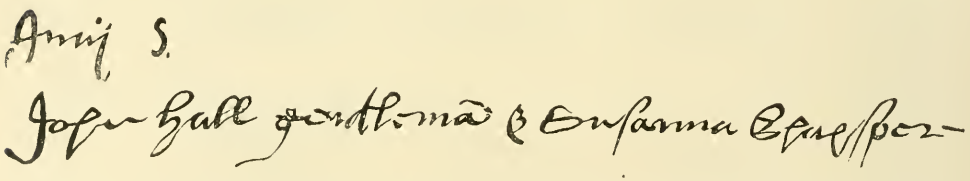
It is a singular fact that no drawings or prints exist of New Place as Shakspere left it, or at any period before the new house was built by Sir Hugh Clopton. It is a more singular fact that although Garrick had been there only fourteen years before the destruction, visiting the place with a feeling of veneration that might have led him and others to preserve some memorial of it, there is no trace whatever existing of



what New Place was before 1757. The wood-cut here given is a fac-simile of an engraving, first published by Malone, and subsequently appended to the variorum editions, which is thus described:—"New Place, from a drawing in the margin of an Ancient Survey, made by order of Sir George Carew (afterwards Baron Carew of Clopton, and Earl of Totnes), and found at Clopton, near Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1786." A person resident at Stratford at the period mentioned as that of the finding of the drawing—Poet Jordan, as he was called—an ignorant person, but ready enough to impose upon antiquarian credulity—an instrument perhaps in the hands of others—he sent to Malone this drawing of New Place from the margin of an ancient survey. If it was a survey found at Clopton, it was a survey of the Clopton property in the possession of the Earl of Totness, who was a contemporary

of Shakspere. New Place, as Malone knew, had been out of the Clopton family fifty years when Shakspere bought it. The drawing is found on the margin of an ancient survey. It is not described in the margin, or elsewhere, as New Place. Immediately opposite New Place is a house which, though altered, is still a very old house. The gables have been concealed by a parapet, the windows have been modernized; but the gables are still to be traced upon ascending the roof. Restore the gables and windows to their primitive state, and we have the very house represented upon "the margin of an ancient survey." That house, which is now occupied by Mr. Hunt, the town-clerk of Stratford, did belong to the Earl of Totness. But look at Shakspere's arms over the door, the "spear in bend." How do we account for this? There is a letter written by Malone on the 15th of April, 1790, to his convenient friend at Stratford, "good Mr. Jordan," in which the following passage occurs:—"Mr. Malone would be glad to have Shakspeare's house on the same scale as that of Sir Hugh Clopton's. He thinks the arms of Shakspere *a very proper ornament over the door, and very likely to have been there;* and *neat wooden pales may be placed with propriety* before the house." And yet this man was the most bitter denouncer of the Ireland forgeries; and shows up, as he had a just right to do, the imposition of the "View of my Masterre Irelande's House," with two coats-of-arms beneath it. Good Mr. Jordan, when, in the pride of his heart at having such a correspondent, he gave a copy of Malone's letter to a gentleman at Stratford, admitted that he had, of his own accord, *added the porch* to the house represented "in the margin of an ancient survey" *

The register of marriages at Stratford-upon-Avon, for the year 1607, contains the following entry:—



Susanna, the eldest daughter of William Shakspere, was now twenty-four years of age. John Hall, gentleman, a physician settled at Stratford, was in his thirty-second year. This appears in every respect to have been a propitious alliance. Shakspere received into his family a man of learning and talent. Dr. Hall lived at a period when medicine was throwing off the empirical rules by which it had been too long directed; and a school of zealous practitioners were beginning to rise up who founded their success upon careful observation. It was the age which produced the great discoveries of Harvey. Shakspere's son-in-law belonged to this school of patient and accurate observers. He kept a record of the cases which came under his care; and his notes, commencing in the year 1617, still exist in manuscript. The minutes of his earlier practice are probably lost. The more remarkable of the cases were published more than twenty years

* See Note at the end of the Volume.

after his death, being translated from the original Latin by James Cooke, and given to the world under the title of 'Select Observations on English Bodies, or Cures in desperate Diseases.' This work went through three editions

[Signature of Dr Hall.]

The season at which the marriage of Shakspere's elder daughter took place would appear to give some corroboration to the belief that, at this period he had wholly ceased to be an actor. It is not likely that an event to him so deeply interesting would have taken place during his absence from Stratford.

[House in the High Street, Stratford.]

It was the season of performances at the Globe; when the eager multitude who crowded the pit might look up through the open roof upon a brilliant sky; and when the poet, whose productions were the chief attraction of that stage, might

rejoice that he could wander in the free woods, and the fresh fields, from the spring time,

> "When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
> Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,"

to the last days of autumn, when he saw

> "The summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
> Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard."

A pleasanter residence than Stratford, independent of all the early associations which endeared it to the heart of Shakspere, would have been difficult to find as a poet's resting-place. It was a town, as most old English towns were, of houses amidst gardens. Built of timber, it had been repeatedly devastated by fires. In 1594 and 1595 a vast number of houses had been thus destroyed; but they were probably small tenements and hovels. New houses arose of a better order; and one still exists, bearing the date on its front of 1596, which indicates something of the picturesque beauty of an old country town before the days arrived which, by one accord, were to be called elegant and refined—their elegance and refinement chiefly consisting in sweeping away our national architecture, and our national poetry, to substitute buildings and books which, to vindicate their own exclusive pretensions to utility, rejected every grace that invention could bestow, and in labouring for a dull uniformity, lost even the character of proportion. Shakspere's own house was no doubt one of those quaint buildings which were pulled down in the last generation, to set up four walls of plain brick, with equi-distant holes called doors and windows. His garden was a spacious one. The Avon washed its banks; and within its

[Bishopton Chapel.]

enclosures it had its sunny terraces and green lawns, its pleached alleys and honeysuckle bowers. If the poet walked forth, a few steps brought him into the country. Near the pretty hamlet of Shottery lay his own grounds of Bishopton, then part of the great common field of Stratford. Not far from the ancient chapel of Bishopton, of which Dugdale has preserved a representation

and the walls of which still remain, would he watch the operation of seed-time and harvest. If he passed the church and the mill, he was in the pleasant meadows that skirted the Avon on the pathway to Ludington. If he desired to cross the river, he might now do so without going round by the great bridge; for in 1599, soon after he bought New Place, the pretty foot-bridge was erected which still bears that date. His walks and his farm-labours were his recreations. But they were not his only pleasures. It is at this period that we can fix the date of Lear. That wonderful tragedy was first published in 1608; and the title-page recites that "It was plaid before the King's Majesty at White-Hall, uppon S. Stephen's Night; in Christmas Hollidaies." This most extraordinary production might well have been the first fruits of a period of comparative leisure; when the creative faculty was wholly untrammelled by petty cares, and the judgment might be employed in working again and again upon the first conceptions, so as to produce such a masterpiece of consummate art without after labour. The next season of repose gave birth to an effort of genius wholly different in character; but almost as wonderful in its profound sagacity and knowledge of the world, as Lear is unequalled for its depth o mdividual passion. Troilus and Cressida was published in 1609. Both these publications were probably made without the consent of the author; but it would seem that these plays were first produced before the Court, and there

[Foot-bridge above the Mill.]

might have been circumstances which would have rendered it difficult or impossible to prevent their publication, in the same way that the publication was prevented of any other plays after 1603, and during the author's life-time.* We may well believe that the Sonnets were published in 1609, without the consent of their author. That the appearance of those remarkable lyrics should

* See Introductory Notice to Troilus and Cressida.

have annoyed him, by exposing, as they now appear in the eyes of some to do the frailties of his nature. we do not for a moment believe. They would be received by his family and by the world as essentially fictitious, and ranked with the productions of the same class with which the age abounded.*

The year 1608 brought its domestic joys and calamities to Shakspere. In the same font where he had been baptized, forty-three years before, was baptized, on the 21st of February, his grand-daughter, "Elizabeth, daughter of John Hall." In the same grave where his father was laid in 1601, was buried his mother. "Mary Shakspere, widow," on the 9th of September, 1608. She

[Stratford Church.]

was the youngest daughter of Robert Arden, who died in 1556. She was probably, therefore, about seventy years of age when her sons followed her to the "house of all living." Whatever had been the fortunes of her early married life, her last years must have been happy, eminently happy. Her eldest son, by the efforts of those talents which in their development might have filled her with apprehension, had won his way to fame and fortune. Though she had parted with him for a season, he was constant in his visits to the home of his childhood. His children were brought up under her care; his wife, in all likelihood, dwelt in affection with her under the same roof. And now he was

* See Illustration of the Sonnets

come to be seldom absent from her; to let her gaze as frequently as she might upon the face of the loved one whom all honoured and esteemed; whose fame she was told was greater than that of any other living man. And this was the child of her earliest cares, and of her humble hopes. He had won for himself a distinction, and a worldly recompense, far above even a mother's expectations. But in his deep affection and reverence he was unchangeably her son. In all love and honour did William Shakspere, in the autumn of 1608, lay the head of his venerable mother beneath the roof of the chancel of his beautiful parish church.*

* Shakspere was at Stratford later in the autumn of 1608. In his will he makes a bequest to his godson, William Walker. The child to whom he was sponsor was baptized at Stratford, October 16, 1608.

NOTE ON THE COPY OF A LETTER SIGNED H. S., PRESERVED AT BRIDGEWATER HOUSE.

In the valuable little volume, by Mr. Collier, entitled 'New Facts regarding the Life of Shakespeare,' published in 1835, the most interesting document that had ever been discovered in connection with the life of Shakspere was first given to the world. Mr. Collier thus describes it:— "It is the copy of a letter signed H. S., and addressed, as we must conclude, to Lord Ellesmere, in order to induce him to exert himself on behalf of the players at Blackfriars, when assailed by the Corporation of London. It has no date, but the internal evidence it contains shows that, in all probability, it refers to the attempt at dislodgement made in the year 1608, and it was in the same bundle as the paper giving a detail of the particular claims of Burbage, Fletcher, Shakespeare, and the rest. . . . . The initials, H. S., at the end, I take to be those of Henry Southampton, who was the noble patron of Shakespeare, and who in this very letter calls the poet his 'especial friend.' . . . . . It has no direction, and the copy was apparently made on half a sheet of paper; but there can be little doubt that the original was placed in the hands of Lord Ellesmere by Burbage or by Shakespeare, when they waited upon the Lord Chancellor in company." We can sympathize with the enthusiasm of Mr. Collier when he discovered this paper:— "When I took up the copy of Lord Southampton's letter, and glanced over it hastily, I could scarcely believe my eyes, to see such names as Shakespeare and Burbage in connection in a manuscript of the time. There was a remarkable coincidence also in the discovery, for it happened on the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and death. I will not attempt to describe my joy and surprise." But for some considerations to which we shall presently advert, we should scarcely feel justified in printing this letter at length; for the tract in which it was originally published was limited to a small number of copies, and Mr. Collier has the best claim to an extended publicity. The document is as follows:—

"My veric honored Lord,—The manie good offices I haue received at your Lordships hands, which ought to make me backward in asking further favors, onely imbouldens me to require more in the same kinde. Your Lordship will be warned howe hereafter you graunt anie sute, seeing it draweth on more and greater demaunds. This which now presseth is to request your Lordship, in all you can, to be good to the poore players of the Black Fryers, who call them selues by authoritie the Seruaunts of his Majestie, and aske for the protection of their most graceous Maister and Sovereigne in this the tyme of their troble. They are threatened by the Lord Maior and Aldermen of London, never friendly to their calling, with the distruction of their meanes of livelihood, by the pulling downe of theire plaichouse, which is a private Theatre, and hath neuer giuen ocasion of anger by anie disorders. These bearers are two of the chiefe of the companie; one of them by name Richard Burbidge, who humblie sueth for your Lordships kinde helpe, for that he is a man famous as our English Roscius, one who fitteth the action to the word, and the word to the action most admirably. By the exercise of his qualitye, industry and good behaviour, he hath be come possessed of the Black Fryers playhouse, which hath bene imployed for playes sithence it was builded by his Father now nere 50 yeres agone. The other is a man no whitt lesse deserving favor, and my especiall friende, till of late an actor of good account in the cumpanie, now a sharer in the same, and writer of some of our best English playes, which as your Lordship knoweth were most singularly liked of Queen Elizabeth, when the cumpanie was called uppon to performe before her Matie at Court at Christmas and Shrovetide. His most gracious Matie King James alsoe, since his coming to the crowne, hath extended his royall favour to the companie in divers waies and at sundric tymes. This other hath to name William Shakespeare, and they are both of one countie, and indeede almost of one towne: both are right famous in their qualitves, though it

longeth not to your Lo. gravitie and wisedome to resort unto the places where they are wont to delight the publique eare. Their trust and sute nowe is not to be molested in their waye of life, whereby they maintaine themselves and their wives and families (being both maried and of good reputation) as well as the widowes and orphanes of some of their dead fellows.

"Your Lo. most bounden at com.

"H. S."

"Copia vera."

An opinion has arisen, which we are bound to state, that the letter signed H S. is not genuine. The objection was made to us a year and a half ago by a gentleman of great critical sagacity. Nothing can be more complete than the evidence connected with its discovery. The high character of the gentleman by whom it was discovered renders this evidence of its authenticity, as far as it goes, entirely unexceptionable. It is beyond all possibility of doubt that this was a "document preserved at Bridgewater House;" found amongst "large bundles of papers, ranging in point of date between 1581, when Lord Ellesmere was made Solicitor-General, and 1616, when he retired from the office of Lord Chancellor." This letter, Mr. Collier says, "was in the same bundle as the paper giving a detail of the particular claims of Burbage, Fletcher, Shakespeare, and the rest." But he does not inform us whether this individual bundle was of the number of those which "remained unexplored"—whether it belonged to the class of bundles of which he says, "It was evident that many of them had never been opened from the time when, perhaps, his own hands [Lord Ellesmere's] tied them together." Some of the bundles had previously been examined for purposes of antiquarian research: "The Rev. H. J. Todd had been there before me," says Mr. Collier, "and had classed some of the documents and correspondence." It is beyond all doubt that if any addition were made to these papers, it must have been at a period quite distinct from that of the Rev. Mr. Todd's examination of them; and in all probability that gentleman did not open the bundle which contained the estimate of the property at the Blackfriars. Was there any previous antiquarian critic who had access to the papers preserved in Bridgewater House? One of the most elaborate forgeries of modern times, that of 'The English Mercurie,' of 1588, was insinuated into the manuscripts of Dr. Birch in the British Museum, which were purchased in 1766. For half a century, upon that authority alone, we went on proclaiming that to the wisdom of Elizabeth and the prudence of Burleigh we owed the first English newspaper. In 1840 it was discovered, through the sagacity of Mr. Watts of the Museum, that the first English newspaper was a palpable forgery. How did it get amongst the papers of Dr. Birch, himself above suspicion? The question has not been solved. But the circumstance is sufficient to justify any inquiry into the genuineness of a document in the slightest degree questionable, although it be found tied up amongst other undoubted documents. The external evidence relating to its discovery requires to be compared with the external evidence of the genuineness of the document; as well as with that portion of the external evidence which is necessary to complete the chain, but which is not supplied by the discoverer.

In the controversy respecting the Ireland Papers in 1796, a good deal of the argument turned upon a letter from Shakspere to the Earl of Southampton, and the Earl's answer. W. H. Ireland, in his 'Authentic Account of the Shakspere Manuscripts,' says, "Having heard of the Lord Southampton's bounty to Shakspere I determined on writing the correspondence between them on that subject; but, on inquiry, could not learn that any signature of his Lordship's was in existence: I accordingly formed his mode of writing, merely from myself." The forger would have more readily got over the difficulty had he purported that the letter was a copy. The danger of detection would have been less; but the supposed authenticity of the document would have been impaired. It would have been said, these papers purport to have belonged to Shakspere: how is it that the original is not found? So may it be asked of the *copia vera* of the letter of H. S. That the document is a *copy* is the great defect in the external evidence of the genuineness. It could not be received in any legal inquiry, unless the date of the copy, the circumstances under which it was made, the proofs of its authenticity derived from the hand-writing, the ink, the paper, were exhibited. All these proofs are wanting in Mr. Collier's account of the discovery. But we cannot here adopt a legal precision. We receive the copy as evidence, however imperfect. But we have first to ask, did the copyist omit the date and the superscription? If so, it was not a *copia vera.* If they were omitted in the original, the omission, although not without a precedent, is an exception to the ordinary practice of those days. A letter from Southampton to the Lord Keeper Williams (preserved in the Harleian MSS. is superscribed "To the right honorable my very good lo: the lo: Keeper of the great Seale of England." It is subscribed, "Your Lo: most assured frend to do you service, H Southampton." But it was the more necessary that the super-

scription should not have been omitted on the occasion of the letter of H. S., because the letter was for the purpose of introducing two persons to ask a favour of a nobleman high in office. Without such a superscription, the nobleman to whom it was presented might have doubted whether it was intended for his hands. It might have been a current letter of recommendation for the Lord Chamberlain or the Lord Chancellor. How do we know that the letter was addressed to Lord Ellesmere at all? It contains not the slightest allusion to his high legal office, unless the sentence "It longeth not to your Lo. gravitie and wisedom to resort unto the places where they are wont to delight the publique eare," may be especially meant for a Lord Chancellor. The letter is certainly of a very peculiar nature. Mr. Collier says, "I do not recollect any instances of letters of a precisely similar kind of so old a date, but they no doubt exist." If the letter were addressed to Lord Ellesmere in 1608, as Mr. Collier holds, it would appear from legal documents found at Bridgewater House that the question then before the Chancellor was the claim by the City of London to jurisdiction within the Blackfriars. A legal opinion in favour of the claim, and proofs against it, are amongst these papers. But the letter of H. S. deals with a very different question. It asks his very honoured Lord "to be good to the poor players of the Blackfriars," who "are threatened by the Lord Maior and Aldermen of London, never friendly to their calling, with the distruction of their meanes of livelihood by the pulling downe of theire plaiehouse." If the Lord Mayor and Aldermen had even established their jurisdiction, it was utterly impossible that they could have *pulled down* the playhouse of the Servants of his Majesty. The players could have had no fear of such an issue. A quarter of a century before, the authorities of the City had pulled down the temporary scaffolds for theatrical performances erected in the yards of the Cross Keys, the Bull, and the Belle Savage; but even then, and much less in 1608, they could no more pull down the substantial private theatre of the Blackfriars Company, the fee of which we have seen was valued at a thousand pounds, than they could pull down Lord Ellesmere's own mansion. To avert this evil, the poor players "aske for the protection of their most graceous Maister and Sovereigne in this the tyme of their troble." They needed not that protection; they already had it. A patent was issued to them in 1603, in virtue of a writ of Privy Seal, directed to Lord Ellesmere himself, in which all justices, mayors, &c., were called upon in all places not to offer them hindrance; to aid and assist them; to render them favours. In the following year, this very theatre of the Blackfriars was expressly recognised in a patent for the performances of the Children of the Revels. But even if the protection of the King were needed by the King's servants, it would scarcely be asked through the Lord Chancellor. Pembroke and Southampton were immediately about the King's person; Pembroke was the Lord Chamberlain. H. S. sets out by acknowledging the good offices he has received at the hands of his very honoured Lord. These civilities presume a freedom of intercourse between two equals in rank, if it is Southamptan who writes the letter, and Lord Ellesmere to whom it is written. But how do we know that Southampton wrote the letter? The subscription is H. S. In the Ireland controversy Malone asserted that Southampton signed his name H. Southampton. Chalmers contended that he had written Southampton without the H. But no one pretended that he had ever signed a letter or a document, with his initials only. The formality of that age was entirely opposed to such a practice. "Your Lordship's most bounden at command," is not the way in which an Earl and a Knight of the Garter would subscribe himself to an equal and an intimate. "Affectionate friend," "assured friend," "loving friend," is the mode in which noblemen subscribe themselves in their familiar correspondence with each other. But "most bounden," "most obedient," "most humbly bounden," is the mode in which a commoner addresses a nobleman. "Most bounden at command" is a humility of which we scarcely find a precedent except in the letter of a servant. Such are the points of objection which first present themselves upon the face of the letter.

But there is a peculiarity in this letter which is very deserving of notice; and which would lead us to wish, especially, that no possible suspicion could rest upon its authenticity. It contains a great deal that is highly interesting to us at the present day, but which must have been considered somewhat impertinent by a great officer of state in his own times. Richard Burbage, according to the letter, is "our English Roscius, one who fitteth the action to the word and the word to the action most admirably." It is pleasant to believe that Lord Southampton was so familiar with Hamlet that he had the very words of the play at his tongue's end. Alleyn in his own day was called "Roscius for a tongue," and Fuller says "He was the Roscius of our age." But H. S. claims the honour for Burbage. This, however, is not a material point in the question about pulling down the playhouse. It is more pleasant to have Lord Southampton calling Shakspere "my especial friend." The description might startle the proud Chancellor; but, passing that, he would scarcely want to know that he was "of late an actor of good accompte in the company." The nobleman who had himself sent for Shakspere's company to perform Othello before the Queen at Harefield

could scarcely require to be told that Shakspere was the "writer of some of our best English plays;" that "they were most singularly liked of Queen Elizabeth;" that the players performed before the Court at Christmas and Shrovetide. The Chancellor to King James, who issued the patent to the company within a few weeks after the accession, could scarcely require to be told that the King had extended his royal favour to them. Interesting as the fact is to us, it seems remarkable that a great law officer should be informed, as to two persons whom his gravity and wisdom must hold somewhat cheap, "they are both of one countie and indeede almost of one towne." It is scarcely complimentary to the nobleman who is addressed, be he Lord Ellesmere or not, to assume that he could only judge of the qualities of these men, the poet and the actor, unless he resorted "unto the places where they are wont to delight the publique eare." Was the nobleman addressed never at the Court of James during the performances at Christmas and at Shrovetide? The writer of the letter, whoever he be, had not a very logical perception. He contradicts what he has assumed, disjoins what has a connexion, and associates what is essentially distinct. A real man, telling a real story, scarcely does this. H. S. assumes that Lord Ellesmere knows nothing about the poor players. He describes them, therefore, with a curious minuteness. One is "writer of some of our best English plays;" and it is added, these plays, "as your Lordship *knoweth*, were most singularly liked of Queen Elizabeth." With such a knowledge on the part of his Lordship, it would have been sufficient to mention the name of one of the men who delivered the letter. And yet his Lordship is left for some time to guess who the man is whose plays, as he *knows*, were singularly liked of Queen Elizabeth; and other matters are gone into before he is told that his name is William Shakespeare; which he did not want to know if he knew that *his* plays were so liked. When he is told the name, it is assumed that he has forgotten all his former knowledge; and he is also told that William Shakespeare is right famous, though it longeth not to his Lordship's wisdom to know anything about him, as he could only attain that knowledge by resorting to public playhouses. And yet he could not so attain this knowledge, because the writer has ceased to be an actor, and is no longer "wont to delight the publique eare." The especial friend, late an actor, is "now a sharer." This would imply that when he was an actor he was not a sharer; and yet we know that he was a sharer twenty years before this. Perhaps there is no positive error here; but there is that looseness of construction which seldom accompanies an actual knowledge of present facts; which indeed is characteristic of an attempt to fabricate a document which should deal safely with remote and minute circumstances. Certainly there are several indications of vagueness and inconsistency, which would render us unwilling wholly to rely upon this document, interesting as it is, for any material fact.

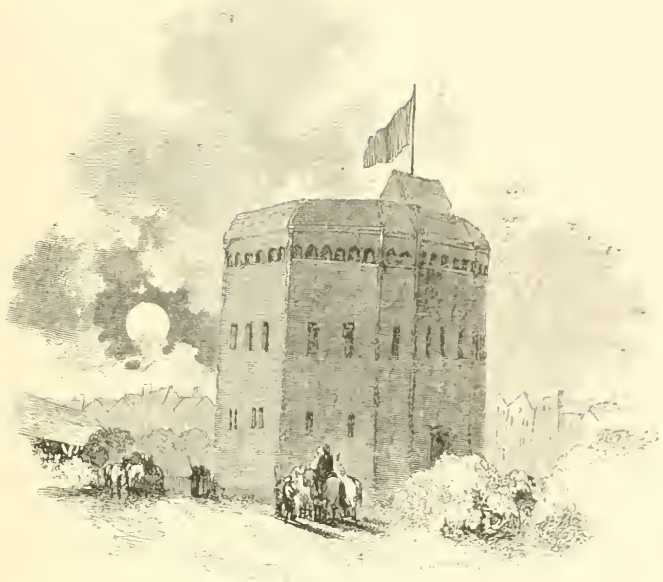
But what fact does it tell us that we did not know from other sources? The evidence as to the writer is not distinct. The person to whom it is written is not defined. The time at which it is written can only be inferred. Is there any fact that could not be known, or assumed, by a person writing so vague a letter, some half century ago, with the intention to deceive, and calling it a *copy*, to get over the difficulty of imitating a known handwriting? We know that there was a man then living who perpetrated such deceptions; who, moving in good society, might readily have had access to the papers at Bridgewater House, and have dropped his cuckoo egg in the sparrow's nest. The failure of William Henry Ireland in the fabrication of a letter from Southampton, might have set a cleverer and more learned man upon trying his hand upon some fabrication more consistent than that of the unlettered forger of the Shakspere Manuscripts, and which should have the safe quality of assuming nothing that was opposed to the belief of those who had written upon Shakspere. If the letter be genuine, it is a singular circumstance that it so entirely corroborates many points of his life with which we had previously been familiar, and tells us so little that was not previously known. It is of a different character in this respect from the important document discovered by Mr. Collier amongst the same papers, showing that Shakspere was a shareholder in the Blackfriars in 1589;—wholly different also from the paper entitled "For avoiding of the Playhouse in the Precinct of the Blacke Friers."

But, on the other hand, there are some facts in the letter of H. S. which have only been brought to light in very recent times. We did not know, until the discovery of the Estimate for avoiding the Theatre, that Burbage had "become possessed of the Blacke Fryers playhouse." We did not know till Mr. Collier published a document in his 'Annals of the Stage,' found in the State Paper Office, that "it was builded by his Father." The statement that it was builded "now nere 50 yeres agone" is contrary to the precise information conveyed in that document. We did not know that the company at the Blackfriars maintained "the widowes and orphanes of some of their dead fellows" till we learnt from the Estimate for avoiding the Playhouse that "the Widowes and Orphanes of Playeres are paide by the Sharers at divers rates and proportions." We subjoin, in parallel columns, some coincidences of statement, and some resemblances of style, which may assist our readers in judging for themselves

in a question in which it is exceedingly difficult to discriminate between the imitations of forgery, and the habitual phrases and current knowledge of a real person :—

[*Passages from the Letter of H. S.*]	[*Passages from old and modern writings.*]
"The many good offices I have received at your Lordship's hands, which ought to make me backward in asking further favours, only emboldens me to require more in the same kind."	"I have found your Lordship already so favourable and affectionate unto me, that I shall be still hereafter desirous to acquaint you with what concerns me, and bold to ask your advice and counsel."—Southampton's Letter to Lord Keeper Williams: *Malone's Inquiry*, 1796.
"The time of their trouble."	"The time of trouble."—*Psalm* xxvii.
"Never given occasion of anger."	"Never given cause of displeasure."—Petition, 1589: *Collier's New Facts.*
"Our English Roscius."	"The Roscius of our age."—*Fuller.*
	"When Roscius was an actor at Rome."—*Hamlet.*
"One who fitteth the action to the word and the word to the action."	"Suit the action to the word, the word to the action."—*Hamlet.*
"My especial friend.'	"Clepe to your conseil a few of youre frendes that ben especial."—*Chaucer.*
	"Dearest Friend."—*Ireland's forged Letter of Southampton to Shakspere.*
"In divers ways and at sundry times."	"At sundrie times and in divers manners."—*Ep. to Hebrews.*
"They are both of one county, and indeed almost of one town"	"I suspect that both he [Heninges] and Burbage were Shakspeare's countrymen."—*Malone's History of the Stage.*
"Whereby they maintain themselves and their wives and families."	"Who have no other means whereby to maintain their wives and families."—Petition of 1596: *Collier's Annals.*
"The widows and orphans of some of their dead fellows."	"The widows and orphans of players, who are paid by the sharers."—Estimate, &c.: *Collier's New Facts.*

We have stated frankly and without reserve the objections to the authenticity of this document which have presented themselves to our mind. It is better to state these fully and fairly than to "hint a doubt." Looking at the decided character of the external evidence as to the discovery, and taking into consideration the improbability of a spurious paper having been smuggled into the company of the Bridgewater documents, we are inclined to confide in it. But, apart from the interesting character of the letter, and the valuable testimony which it gives to the nature of the intercourse between Southampton and Shakspere—"my especial friend"—we might lay it aside with reference to its furnishing any new materials for the life of the poet, with the exception of the statement that he and Burbage were "both of one county." Confiding in it, as we are anxious to do, we accept it as a valuable illustration of that life. We have on several occasions referred to the letter of H. S.; and in this examination we can have no wish to neutralize our own inferences from its genuineness. These, however, in this Biography, have reference only to the assertion, 1st, That Burbage and Shakspere were of one county and almost of one town: this was a conjecture made by Malone. 2nd. That there was deep friendship between Southampton and Shakspere: this is an old traditionary belief, supported by the dedications of Venus and Adonis and the Lucrece. 3rd. That Shakspere left the stage previous to 1608: this differs little from the prevailing opinion, that he quitted it before 1605, founded upon his name not appearing to a play of Ben Jonson in that year.



[The Bear Garden.]

CHAPTER XI.

GLIMPSES OF LONDON.

There is a memorandum existing (to which we shall hereafter more particularly advert), by Thomas Greene, a contemporary of Shakspere, residing at Stratford, which, under the date of November 17th, 1614, has this record:—"My cousin Shakspeare coming yesterday to town, I went to see him how he did." We cite this memorandum here, as an indication of Shakspere's habit of occasionally visiting London; for Thomas Greene was then in the capital, with the intent of opposing the project of an inclosure at Stratford. The frequency of Shakspere's visits to London would essentially depend upon the nature of his connexion with the theatres. He was a permanent shareholder, as we have seen, at the Blackfriars; and no doubt at the Globe also. His interests as a sharer might be diligently watched over by his fellows; and he might only

have visited London when he had a new play to bring forward, the fruit of his leisure in the country. But until he disposed of his wardrobe and other properties, more frequent demands might be made upon his personal attendance than if he were totally free from the responsibilities belonging to the charge of such an embarrassing stock in trade. Mr. Collier has printed a memorandum in the handwriting of Edward Alleyn, dated April 1612, of the payment of various sums "for the Blackfryers," amounting to 599*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* Mr. Collier adds, "To whom the money was paid is nowhere stated; but, for aught we know, it was to Shakespeare himself, and just anterior to his departure from London." The memorandum is introduced with the observation, "It seems very likely, from evidence now for the first time to be adduced, that Alleyn became the purchaser of our great dramatist's interest in the theatre, properties, wardrobe, and stock of the Blackfriars." Certainly the document itself says nothing about properties wardrobe, and stock. It is simply as follows:—

"April 1612.

Money paid by me E. A. for the Blackfryers .	160 li
More for the Blackfryers	126 li
More againe for the Leasse	310 li
The writinges for the same, and other small charges	3 li 6s. 8d."

More than half of the entire sum is paid "again for the lease." If the estimate "For avoiding of the Playhouse," &c.* be not rejected as an authority, the conjecture of Mr. Collier that the property purchased by Alleyn belonged to Shakspere is wholly untenable; for the Fee, valued at a thousand pounds, was the property of Burbage, and to the owner of the Fee would be paid the sum for the lease. Subsequent memoranda by Alleyn show that he paid rent for the Blackfriars, and expended sums upon the building—collateral proofs that it was not Shakspere's personal property that he bought in April 1612. There is distinct evidence furnished by another document that Shakspere was not a resident in London in 1613; for in an indenture executed by him on the 10th of March in that year, for the purchase of a dwelling-house in the precinct of the Blackfriars, he is described as "William Shakespeare of Stratforde Upon Avon in the countie of Warwick, gentleman;" whilst his fellow John Hemyng, who is a party to the same deed, is described as "of London, gentleman." From the situation of the property it would appear to have been bought either as an appurtenance to the theatre, or for some protection of the interests of the sharers. In the deed of 1602, Shakspere is also described as of Stratford-upon-Avon. It is natural that he should be so described, in a deed for the purchase of land at Stratford; but upon the same principle, had he been a resident in London in 1613, he would have been described as of London in a deed for the purchase of property in London. Yet we also look upon this conveyance as evidence that Shakspere had in March 1613 not wholly severed himself from his interest in the theatre.† He is in London at the signing of the deed, attending, probably, to the duties which still devolved upon him as a sharer in the Blackfriars. He is not a resident in London; he has come

See page 485.

† See Note at the end of this Chapter.

[Edward Alleyn.]

to town, as Thomas Greene describes, in 1614. But we have no evidence that he sold his theatrical property at all. Certainly the evidence that he sold it to Edward Alleyn may be laid aside in any attempt to fix the date of Shakspere's departure from London.

In the November of 1611 two of Shakspere's plays were acted at Whitehall. The entries of their performance are thus given in the 'Book of the Revels:'—

"By the Kings Players:	Hallomas nyght was presented att Whithall before ye Kinge Matie a play called the Tempest.
The Kings Players:	The 5th of Nouember; A play called ye winters nights Tayle."

That The Tempest was a new play when thus performed, it would be difficult to affirm, upon this entry alone. In the earlier part of the reign of James we have seen that old plays of Shakspere were performed before the King; but at that period all his plays would be equally novel to the Monarch and to the Court. According to the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber, the performances at Court of the King's players appear to have been so numerous after the year of the accession, that it would be necessary to add the attraction of

novelty even to Shakspere's stock plays. At the Christmas and Shrovetide of 1604-5 there were thirteen performances by Shakspere's company; in 1605-6, ten plays by the same; in October, 1606, upon the occasion of the visit of the King of Denmark, three plays; in 1606-7, twenty-two plays; in 1607-8 there is no record of payments, but in 1608-9 there are twelve plays; in 1610-11 fifteen plays; and in 1611-12 (the holidays to which we are now more particularly referring) there were six performances by Shakspere's company before the King, and sixteen by the same company "before the Prince's Highness." But, however probable it may be that the players would be ready with novelties for the Court, especially when other companies performed constantly before the royal family, we have a distinct record that the plays of Shakspere held their ground, even though the Court was familiar with them. At the Easter of 1618, Twelfth Night and The Winter's Tale were performed before the King. We are not, therefore, warranted in concluding that in 1611 The Tempest was a new play; although we have evidence that The Winter's Tale was then a new play. Dr. Forman saw The Winter's Tale at the Globe on the 15th of May, 1611; and he describes it with a minuteness which would make it appear that he had not seen it before. This is not conclusive; but in 1623 The Winter's Tale is entered in the Office-Book of the Master of the Revels as an old play, "formerly allowed of by Sir George Bucke." Sir George's term of office commenced in 1610. This fixes the date with tolerable accuracy, and shows that it was not an old play when performed at Court on the 5th of November, 1611. There is a passage in the play which might be implied to refer to the great event of which that day was the anniversary :—

> "If I could find example
> Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
> And flourish'd after, I'd not do't: but since
> Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment, bears not one,
> Let villainy itself forswear't."

But there was a more recent example of the fate of one who had struck an anointed king. Henry the Fourth of France was stabbed by Ravaillac on the 14th of May, 1610; and certainly the terrible end of the assassin was a warning for "villainy itself" to forswear such a crime. If The Tempest and The Winter's Tale, and probably Cymbeline also, belong to this epoch—and we believe that they were separated by a very short interval—we have the most delightful evidence of the perfect healthfulness of Shakspere's mind at this period of his life. To the legendary tales upon which the essentially romantic drama is built, he brought all the graces of his poetry and all the calm reflectiveness of his mature understanding. Beauty and wisdom walked together as twin sisters.

The Book of the Revels, 1611-12, which thus shows us that the graces of Perdita and the charms of Prospero had shed their influence over the courtly throngs of Whitehall, also informs us that on Twelfth Night the 'Prince's Masque' was performed. In the margin there is this entry: "This day the King and Prince with divers of his noblemen did run at the ring for a prize.'

There was a magnificence about the Court of James at this period which probably had some influence even upon the productions which Shakspere presented to the Court and the people. The romantic incidents of The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, the opportunities afforded by the construction of their plots for gorgeous scenery, the masque so beautifully interwoven with the loves of Ferdinand and Miranda, all was in harmony with the poetical character of the royal revels. Prince Henry in his premature manhood was distinguished for his skill in all noble exercises. The tournaments of this period were attempts on the part of the Prince to revive the spirit of chivalry. The young man was himself of a high and generous nature; and if he was surrounded by some favourites whose embroidered suits and glittering armour were the coverings of heartless profligacy and low ambition, there were others amongst the courtiers who honestly shared the enthusiasm of Henry, and invoked the genius of chivalry,

"Possess'd with sleep, dead as a lethargy,"

to awake at the name Meliadus.* The 'Prince's Masque' was one of those elegant productions of Ben Jonson which have given an immortality to the fleeting pleasures of the nights of Whitehall. Jonson's own descriptions of the scenery of these masques show how much that was beautiful as well as surprising was attempted with imperfect materials. The effects were perhaps very inferior to the scenic displays of the modern stage, though Inigo Jones was the machinist. But the descriptions of these wonders — rocks, and moons, and transparent palaces, and moving chariots — are as vivid as if the genius of Stanfield had realized the poet's conceptions.† It was probably on some one of these occasions that Jonson became known to Drummond, who had succeeded to his

* The name adopted by the Prince. Drummond called him *Mœliades*, an anagram of *Miles à Deo*.

† See Mr. Peter Cunningham's 'Life of Inigo Jones;'—one of those performances in which is shown how accuracy and dulness are not essential companions; how taste and antiquarianism may co-exist.

inheritance, and was seeking in the excitement of travel some relief to that melancholy which was produced by the sudden bereavement of his betrothed mistress—a loss which embittered his life, but gave to his genius much of its delicacy and tenderness. The mind of Drummond was too refined for the rough work which belongs to a court, even amongst its glittering.

> "O how more sweet is bird's harmonious moan,
> Or the hoarse sobbings of the widow'd dove,
> Than those smooth whisp'rings near a prince's throne,
> Which good make doubtful, do the evil approve."

There was another maker of verses—a Scot—in the Court of James, who, though not without talent, would in his inmost heart despise the "love of peace and lonely musing" which were characteristic of the poet of Hawthornden. William

[William Alexander, Earl of Stirling.]

Alexander had essentially a prosaic mind; though he did accomplish four monarchic tragedies, which some wise critics have put in the same class with the Roman plays of Shakspere. Whether he was engaged in the manufacture of plays or copper money, he had essentially an eye to his own advancement; and if James called him his philosophical poet, we may still believe that the King thought there was more true philosophy in Alexander's money-making scheme for a new order of baronets than in the many thousand lines of laborious writing and reading which by courtesy were called 'Recreations with the Muses.' We may without much want of charity suspect that Jonson's 'Prince's Masque' and Shakspere's Winter's

Tale might be regarded by the Earl of Stirling as Pepys regarded the Midsummer Night's Dream—"It is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life."

The refinements of the Court extended to the people. The Bear-Garden was adapted to theatrical performances; and rendered "convenient in all things both for players to play in, and for the game of bears and bulls to be baited in the same."* The gorgeousness of the scenic displays of Whitehall became at this period a subject of imitation at the public theatres. Sir Henry Wotton thus writes to his nephew on the 6th of July, 1613:—"Now to let matters of state sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what happened this week at the Bankside. The King's players had a new play, called 'All is True,' representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry the Eighth, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the knights of the order, with their Georges and Garter, the guards with their embroidered coats and the like; sufficient, in truth, within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous." This description, as we believe, applies to the original representation of Shakspere's play of Henry VIII.† We believe also that Shakspere on this occasion introduced such a compliment to the government of the King as was consistent with the independence of his character and that genuine patriotism that was a part of his nature.—

> "Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
> His honour, and the greatness of his name,
> Shall be, and make new nations."

This is somewhat different from Jonson's compliment to the man:—

> "His meditations, to his height, are even
> All, all their issue is akin to heaven—
> He is a god o'er kings."‡

And yet it has been said, either that Shakspere condescended to be a flatterer, or that he did not write the compliment to James implied in Cranmer's prophecy. We believe that he did write the lines; that they are not an interpolation; and that, although they may have been written in the spirit of gratitude for personal favours, it is gratitude of the loftiest kind, honourable alike to the giver and to the receiver, because wholly free from adulation.

There was a catastrophe at this representation of the new play of Henry VIII. which may possibly have had some influence upon the future life of Shakspere. Sir Henry Wotton thus describes the burning of the Globe theatre:—"Now King Henry, making a mask at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes being more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming, within less than an hour, the whole house to the very ground." The Globe was re-built in the ensuing

* Collier's 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. iii., p. 285.

† See Introductory Notice to Henry VIII.

‡ Masque of Oberon

spring. The conflagration was so rapid that Prynne wished to show it was a judgment of Providence upon players—"The sudden fearful burning even to the ground." Jonson, in his 'Execration upon Vulcan,' says the Globe was

"Raz'd, ere thought could urge, this might have been."

It appears likely that this calamity terminated the direct and personal connexion of Shakspere with the London stage. We do not find him associated with the rebuilding of the Globe, nor with any of the schemes for new theatres with which Alleyn and Henslow were so busy. We have no record whatever of any new play of Shakspere's being produced after this performance of Henry VIII. at the Globe. Was he wholly idle as a writer? We apprehend not. Of the three Roman plays we have yet to speak. In the meanwhile let us take a rapid survey of the state of dramatic poetry, and of the later disciples of the school of Shakspere. We have already given a sketch of the more remarkable of the contemporaries with whom he would necessarily be associated in the last years of the previous century.

In the Address to the Reader prefixed to the first edition, published in 1612, of 'The White Devil, or Vittoria Corombona,' of John Webster, is the following passage:—"Detraction is the sworn friend to ignorance: for mine own part, I have ever truly cherished my good opinion of other men's worthy labours, especially of that full and heightened style of Master Chapman; the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson; the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher; and lastly (without wrong last to be named), the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light; protesting that, in the strength of mine own judgment, I know them so worthy, that though I rest silent in my own work, yet to most of theirs I dare (without flattery) fix that of Martial:

'Non norunt hæc monumenta mori.'"

Webster was formed upon Shakspere. He had no pretensions to the inexhaustible wit, the all-penetrating humour of his master; but he had the power of approaching the terrible energy of his passion, and the profoundness of his pathos, in characters which he took out of the great muster-roll of humanity, and placed in fearful situations, and sometimes with revolting imaginings almost beyond humanity. Those who talk of the carelessness of Shakspere may be surprised to find that his praise is that of a "right happy and copious industry." It is clear what dramatic writers were the objects of Webster's love. He did not aspire to the "full and heightened style of Master Chapman," nor would his genius be shackled by the examples of "the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson." He belonged to the school of the romantic dramatists. Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher are "worthily excellent;" but his aspiration was to imitate "the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light." There were critics, then, who

regarded the romantic drama as a diversion for the multitude only; and Webster thinks it necessary to apologize for his deliberate choice—"Willingly and not ignorantly in this kind have I faulted." He says—"If it be objected this is no true dramatic poem, I shall easily confess it, non potes in nugas dicere plura meas, ipse ego quam dixi; willingly, and not ignorantly, in this kind have I faulted: for should a man present, to such an auditory, the most sententious tragedy that ever was written, observing all the critical laws, as height of style, and gravity of person, enrich it with the sententious Chorus, and, as it were, 'liven death, in the passionate and weighty Nuntias; yet, after all this divine rapture, O dura messorum ilia, the breath that comes from the uncapable multitude is able to poison it; and, ere it be acted, let the author resolve to fix to every scene this of Horace—

'Hæc porcis hodie comedenda relinques.'"

As early as 1602, Webster was a writer for Henslow's theatre, in conjunction with Dekker, Drayton, Middleton, Chettle, Heywood, and Wentworth Smith. At a later period he was more directly associated with Dekker alone His great tragedies of 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfi' were produced at the period when Shakspere had almost ceased to write; and it is probably to this circumstance we owe these original and unaided efforts of Webster's genius. There was a void to be filled up, and it was worthily filled up.

[Thomas Dekker]

Webster has placed his coadjutor Dekker next to Shakspere. We have before pointed attention to this remarkable man's early career. As he advanced in years he was wielding greater powers, and dealing with higher things than belonged to the satirist. In his higher walk he is of the school of nature and

implicity. Hazlitt speaks of one of his plays, perhaps the best, with true artistical feeling:—"The rest of the character is answerable to the beginning The execution is, throughout, as exact as the conception is new and masterly. There is the least colour possible used; the pencil drags; the canvas is almost seen through: but then, what precision of outline, what truth and purity of tone, what firmness of hand, what marking of character! . . . . . It is as if there were some fine art to chisel thought, and to embody the inmost movements of the mind in every-day actions and familiar speech."* Dekker acquired some of his satirical propensities, but the tenderness of his heart was also called forth, in the crooked ways and dark places of misfortune. Almost the first record of his life is a memorandum by Henslow of the loan of forty shillings, "to discharge Mr. Dicker out of the Counter in the Poultry." Oldys, in his manuscript notes upon Langbaine, affirms that he was in the King's Bench Prison from 1613 to 1616. His own calamities furnish a commentary to the tenderness of many such passages as the following, in which a father is told of the miseries of his erring daughter:—

> "I 'm glad you are wax, not marble; you are made
> Of man's best temper; there are now good hopes
> That all these heaps of ice about your heart,
> By which a father's love was frozen up,
> Are thaw'd in these sweet show'rs fetch'd from your eyes:
> We are ne'er like angels till our passion dies.
> She is not dead, but lives under worse fate;
> I think she's poor." †

The praise of industry belongs to Dekker, though its fruits were poverty. He lived to a considerable age, and he laboured to the last at play or pamphlet. But the amount of his productions becomes almost insignificant when compared with the more than "copious industry" of Thomas Heywood. He was a scholar, having been educated at Cambridge—at Peterhouse, it is said; but he became an actor as early as 1598, being then a sharer in Henslow's company. In 1633 he claimed for himself the authorship, entirely or in part, of two hundred and twenty dramas. We have expressed an opinion that Heywood might have been the writer of 'The Yorkshire Tragedy.' Many of his two hundred and twenty dramas were probably such short pieces as that clever performance. Heywood had the power of stirring the affections, of moving pity and terror by true representations of the course of crime and misery in real life. Charles Lamb has summed up the character of his writings in three lines:—"Heywood is a sort of prose Shakspeare. His scenes are to the full as natural and affecting. But we miss the poet, that which in Shakspeare always appears out and above the surface of the nature." Winstanley, not a very trustworthy authority, speaking of Heywood's wonderful fertility, says—"He not only acted himself almost every day, but also wrote each day a sheet; and that he might lose no time, many of his plays were composed in the tavern, on the back side of tavern bills which may be an occasion that so many of them are lost."

* 'Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth.'

† 'The Honest Whore,' Second Part, Act I., Scene I.

Francis Beaumont was a boy at the period to which our slight notice of his great coadjutor Fletcher belongs. At the epoch we are now describing he is within three years of the termination of his short race. The poetical union of Beaumont and Fletcher has given birth to stories, such as Aubrey delights in telling, that their friendship extended even to a community of lodging and clothes, with other matters in common that are held to belong to the perfection of the social system. We neither believe these things entirely, nor do we quite receive the assertion of Dr. Earle, that Beaumont's "main business was to correct the overflowings of Mr. Fletcher's wit." Edward Phillips repeats this assertion. They first came before the world in the association of a title-page in 1607. The junior always preceded the elder poet in such announcements of their works; and this was probably determined by the alphabetical arrangement. We have many indications that Beaumont was regarded by his contemporaries as a man of great and original power. It was not with the exaggeration of a brother's love that Sir John Beaumont wrote his affecting epitaph upon the death of Francis:—

> "Thou shouldst have follow'd me, but death to blame
> Miscounted years, and measur'd age by fame."

He was buried by the side of Chaucer and Spenser, in the hallowed earth where it was wished that Shakspere should have been laid:—

> "Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
> To learned Chaucer; and, rare Beaumont, lie
> A little nearer Spenser, to make room
> For Shakespear in your threefold, fourfold tomb.
> To lodge all four in one bed make a shift,
> For, until doomsday hardly will a fifth,
> Betwixt this day and that, by fates be slain,
> For whom your curtains need be drawn again." *

* 'Elegy on Shakespear,' by W. Basse.

[Francis Beaumont.]

When Shakspere's company performed at Wilton, in December, 1603, it is more than probable that there was a young man present at those performances, perhaps familiar with Shakspere himself, whose course of life might have been determined by the impulses of those festive hours. Philip Massinger, who in 1603 was nineteen years of age, was the son of a gentleman filling a service of trust in the household of the Earls of Pembroke. At this period Philip was a commoner of St. Alban Hall, Oxford. "Being sufficiently famed for several specimens of wit, he betook himself to making plays." This is Anthony Wood's account of the dedication of Massinger to a pursuit which brought him little but hopeless poverty. Amongst Henslow's papers was found an undated letter, addressed to him by Nathaniel Field, with postscripts signed by Robert Daborne and Philip Massinger. Malone conjectures that the letter was written between 1612 and 1615, Henslow having died in January, 1616 The letter, which is a melancholy illustration of the oft-told tale of the misfortunes of genius, was first given in the additions to Malone's 'Historical Account of the English Stage:'—

[Philip Massinger.]

"To our most loving friend, Mr. Philip Hinchlow, Esquire, These.

"Mr. Hinchlow,

"You understand our unfortunate extremity, and I do not think you so void of Christianity but that you would throw so much money into the Thames as we request now of you, rather than endanger so many innocent lives. You know there is xl. more at least to be received of you for the

play. We desire you to lend us *vl.* of that; which shall be allowed to you; without which we cannot be bailed, nor I play any more till this be dispatched. It will lose you *xxl.* ere the end of the next week, besides the hinderance of the next new play. Pray, Sir, consider our cases with humanity, and now give us cause to acknowledge you our true friend in time of need. We have entreated Mr. Davison to deliver this note, as well to witness your love as our promises, and always acknowledgment to be ever

"Your most thankful and loving friends,

"NAT. FIELD.

"The money shall be abated out of the money remains for the play of Mr. Fletcher and ours.

"ROBERT DABORNE.

"I have ever found you a true loving friend to me, and in so small a suit, it being honest, I hope you will not fail us.

"PHILIP MASSINGER."

[Nathaniel Field.]

By an indorsement on the letter it is shown that Henslow made the advance which these unfortunate men required. But how was it that Massinger, who was brought up under the patronage of a family distinguished for their encouragement of genius, was doomed to struggle for many years with abject penury, and when he died in 1640 was left alone in the world, to have his name inscribed in the burial register of St. Saviour's as "Philip Massinger, a stranger"? Gifford conjectures that he became a Roman Catholic early in life, and thus gave offence to the noble family with whom his father had been so intimately connected. In 1623 Massinger published his 'Bondman,' dedicating it to the second of the Herberts, Philip Earl of Montgomery. The dedication shows that he had been an alien from the house in the service of which his father lived and died: "However I could never arrive at the happiness to be made known to your Lordship, yet a desire, born with me, to make a tender of all duties and service to the noble family of the Herberts, descended to me as an inheritance from my dead father, Arthur Massinger. Many years he happily spent in the service of your honourable house, and died a servant to it." There is something unintelligible in all this; though we may well believe with Gifford that "whatever might be the unfortunate circumstance which

deprived the author of the patronage and protection of the elder branch of the Herberts, he did not imagine it to be of a disgraceful nature; or he would not, in the face of the public, have appealed to his connexions with the family."* It is difficult to trace the course of Massinger's poetical life. 'The Virgin Martyr,' in which he was assisted by Dekker, was the first printed of his plays; and that did not appear till 1622. But there can be little doubt that it belongs to an earlier period; for in 1620 a fee was paid to the Master of the Revels on the occasion of 'New reforming The Virgin Martyr." The 'Bondman' was printed within a year after it was produced upon the stage; and from that period till the time of his death several of his plays were published, but at very irregular intervals. It would appear that during the early portion of his career Massinger was chiefly associated with other writers. To the later period belong his great works, such as 'The Duke of Milan,' 'The City Madam,' and the 'New Way to pay Old Debts.' Taken altogether, Massinger was perhaps the worthiest successor of Shakspere; and this indeed is praise enough.

Nat Field, the writer of the letter to Henslow, was a player, as we learn by that letter. The same document shows that he was a player in the service of Henslow. But he is mentioned in the first folio edition of Shakspere's plays, as one of the principal actors in them. The best evidence of the genius of Field is his association with Massinger in the noble play of 'The Fatal Dowry.' He probably was not connected with Shakspere's company during Shakspere's life; but he is named in a patent to the actors at the Blackfriars and Globe in 1620. Robert Daborne, who was associated with Field and Massinger in their "extremity," was either at this period, or subsequently, in holy orders.

Thomas Middleton was a contemporary of Shakspere. We find him early associated with other writers, and in 1602 was published his comedy of "Blurt Master-Constable." Edward Phillips describes him as "a copious writer for the English stage, contemporary with Jonson and Fletcher, though not of equal

* Introduction to the Works of Massinger.

[Thomas Middleton.]

repute, and yet on the other side not altogether contemptible." He continued to write on till the suppression of the theatres, and the opinion of Phillips was the impression as to his powers at the period of the Restoration. Ford,—who has truly been called "of the first order of poets"—Rowley, Wilson, Hathway, Porter, Houghton, Day, Tourneur, Taylor, arose as the day-star of Shakspere was setting. Each might have been remarkable in an age of mediocrity, some are still illustrious. The great dramatic literature of England was the creation of half a century only; and in that short space was heaped up such a prodigality of riches that we regard this wondrous accumulation with something too much of indifference to the lesser gems, dazzled by the lustre of the

"One entire and perfect chrysolite."

NOTE ON THE CONVEYANCE TO SHAKSPERE IN 1613.

The counterpart of the original conveyance, and a mortgage-deed connected with it, in addition to the information which they furnish us as to Shakspere's life, exhibit two out of the six undoubted examples of his autograph.* The person disposing of the property is "Henry Walker, citizain of London and minstrel of London." William Shakspere is the purchaser, for the sum of 140*l.*; but there are other parties to the deed, namely, William Johnson, John Jackson, and John Heminge. It appears, by an assignment executed after Shakspere's death by these parties, that they held this property in trust, and surrendered it to the uses of Shakspere's will. It seems to us probable that this tenement was purchased by Shakspere for some object connected with the property in the theatre, for this reason: On the day after the purchase, the 11th of March, he and the other parties execute a mortgage-deed to Henry Walker, the vendor (in the form of a lease of a hundred years at a pepper-corn rent) of the property so purchased, with a covenant that if William Shakspere shall pay the sum of 60*l.* on the 29th of September next coming, to the said Henry Walker, the lease shall be null and void. It thus appears that Shakspere was not in a condition on the 10th of March to pay the whole of this purchase-money; but that he could rely upon the receipt of the difference within the next six months. It would appear unlikely that he would purchase a tenement in London, being straitened in the means of paying for it, if he had disposed of his theatrical property in the Blackfriars the year previous; or that he would have bought it at all unless with some reference to the advantage of that theatrical property. At the date of the indenture the premises appear to have been untenanted. They were "now or late in the occupation of one William Ireland." But according to Shakspere's will, three years afterwards, "one John Robinson" dwelt in the messuage "in the Blackfriars in London, near the Wardrobe." Richard Robinson was one of the principal actors in Shakspere's plays—the "Dick Robinson" of Ben Jonson. John Robinson was probably also connected with the theatre.

* See Note on Shakspere's Autographs at the end of Chapter XII

[Chancel of Stratford Church.]

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST BIRTHDAY.

EVERY one agrees that during the last three or four years of his life Shakspere ceased to write. Yet we venture to think that every one is in error. The opinion is founded upon a belief that he only finally left London towards the close of 1613. We have shown, from his purchase of a large house at Stratford, his constant acquisition of landed property there, his active engagements in the business of agriculture, the interest which he took in matters connected with his property in which his neighbours had a common interest, that he

must have partially left London before this period. There were no circumstances, as far as we can collect, to have prevented him finally leaving London several years before 1613. But his biographers, having fixed a period for the termination of his connexion with the active business of the theatre, assume that he became wholly unemployed; that he gave himself up, as Rowe has described, to "ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends." His income was enough, they say, to dispense with labour; and therefore he did not labour. They have attained to "a perfect conviction, that when Shakspere bade adieu to London, he left it predetermined to devote the residue of his days exclusively to the cultivation of social and domestic happiness in the shades of retirement." These are Dr. Drake's words, who repeats what he has found in Malone and the other commentators. Mr. De Quincey, a biographer of a higher mark, gives a currency to a very similar opinion:—"From 1591 to 1611 are just twenty years, within which space lie the whole dramatic creations of Shakspeare, averaging nearly one for every six months. In 1611 was written The Tempest, which is supposed to have been the last of all Shakspeare's works."* The Tempest has been held by some to be Shakspere's latest work; as Twelfth Night was held by others to be the latest. The conclusion in the case of the Twelfth Night has been proved to be far wide of the truth. There was poetry, at any rate, in the belief that he who wrote

> "I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book,"

was "inspired to typify himself;"†—for ever to renounce the spells by which he had bound the subject mind. This is, indeed, poetical; but it is opposed to all the experience of the course of a great intellect. Shakspere had to abjure no "rough magic," such as his Prospero abjured. His "potent art" was built on the calm and equal operations of his surpassing genius. More than half of his life had been employed in the habitual exercise of this power. The strong spur, first of necessity, and secondly of his professional duty, enabled him to wield this power, even amidst the distractions of a life of constant and variable occupation. But when the days of pleasure arrived, is it reasonable to believe that the mere habit of his life would not assert its ordinary control; that the greatest of intellects would suddenly sink to the condition of an every-day man—cherishing no high plans for the future, looking back with no desire to equal and excel the work of the past? At the period of life when Chaucer began to write the 'Canterbury Tales,' Shakspere, according to his biographers, was suddenly and utterly to cease to write. We cannot believe it. Is there a parallel case in the career of any great artist who had won for himself competence and fame? Is the mere applause of the world, and a sufficiency of the goods of life, "the end-all and the be-all" of the labours of a mighty mind? These attained, is the voice of his spiritual being to be heard no more? Are the

* 'Encyclopædia Britannica'—Article, 'Shakspeare.'

† Campbell—Preface to Moxon's Edition of Shakspeare.

thoughts with which he daily wrestles to have no utterance? Is he to come down from the mountain from which he had a Pisgah-view of life, and what is beyond life, to walk on the low shore where the other children of humanity pick up shells and pebbles, from the first hour of their being to the last? If those who reason thus could present a satisfactory record of the dates of all Shakspere's works, and especially of his later works, we should still cling to the belief that some fruits of the last years of his literary industry had wholly perished. It is unnecessary, as it appears to us, to adopt any such theory. Without the means of fixing the precise date of many particular dramas, we have indisputable traces, up to this period, of the appearance of at least five-sixths of all Shakspere's undoubted works. The mention by contemporaries, the notices of their performance at Court, the publications through the press, enable us to assign epochs to a very large number of these works, whether the labours of his youth, his manhood, or his full and riper years. It is not a fanciful theory that these works were produced in cycles; that at one period he saw the capabilities of the English history for dramatic representation; at another poured forth the brilliancy of his wit and the richness of his humour in a succession of heart-inspiriting comedies; at another conceived those great tragic creations which have opened a new world to him who would penetrate into the depths of the human mind; taking a loftier range even in his lighter efforts, at another time shedding the light of his philosophy and the richness of his poetry over the regions of romantic fiction, while other men would have been content to amuse by the power of a well-constructed plot and a rapid succession of incidents. Are there any dramas which belong to a class not yet described—dramas whose individual appearance is not accounted for by those who have attempted to fix the exact chronology of other plays? There is such a class. It is formed of the three great Roman plays of Coriolanus, Julius Cæsar, and Antony and Cleopatra. In our Introductory Notices to those plays we have stated every circumstance by which Malone and others attempted to fix their date as between 1607 and 1610. There is not one atom of evidence upon the subject beyond the solitary fact that "A book called Antony and Cleopatra," without the name of Shakspere as its author, was entered at Stationers' Hall on the 20th of May, 1608. Every other entry of a play by Shakspere has preceded the publication of the play, whether piratical or otherwise. The Antony and Cleopatra of Shakspere was not published till fifteen years afterwards; it was entered in 1623 by the publishers of the folio as one of the copies "not formerly entered to other men." And yet we are told that the entry of 1608 is decisive as to the date of Shakspere's Antony and Cleopatra. The conjectures of Malone and Chalmers, which would decide the date of these great plays by some fancied allusion, are more than usually trivial. What they are we need not here repeat.

The lines prefixed by Leonard Digges to the first collected edition of Shakspere's works would seem to imply that Julius Cæsar had been acted, and was popular:—

> "Nor fire nor cank'ring age, as Naso said
> Of his, thy wit-fraught book shall once invade;
> Nor shall I e'er believe or think thee dead
> (Though miss'd) until our bankrout stage be sped
> (Impossible!) with some new strain'd t' outdo,
> Passions of Juliet and her Romeo;
> Or till I hear a scene more nobly take
> Than when thy half-sword parleying Romans spake."

The "half-sword parleying Romans" alludes, there can be little doubt, to the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius; and this is evidence that the play was performed before the publication of Digges's verses. We believe that it was performed during Shakspere's lifetime. Malone says, "It appears by the papers of the late Mr. George Vertue, that a play called Cæsar's Tragedy was acted at Court before the 10th of April, in the year 1613." We agree with Malone that this was probably Shakspere's Julius Cæsar. That noble tragedy is in every respect an acting play. It is not too long for representation; it has no scenes in which the poet seems to have abandoned himself to the inspiration of his subject, postponing the work of curtailment till the necessities of the stage should demand it. Not so was Coriolanus; not so especially was Antony and Cleopatra. They each contain more lines than any other of Shakspere's plays; they are each nearly a third longer than Julius Cæsar. It is our belief that they were not acted in Shakspere's lifetime; and that his fellows, the editors of the folio in 1623, had the honesty to publish them from the posthumous manuscripts, uncurtailed. In their existing state they are not only too long for representation, but they exhibit evidence of that exuberance which characterizes the original execution of a great work of art, when the artist, throwing all his vigour into the conception, leaves for a future period the rejection or compression of passages, however splendid they may be, which impede the progress of the action, and destroy that proportion which must never be sacrificed even to individual beauty. We know that this was the principle upon which Shakspere worked in the correction of his greatest efforts —his Hamlet, his Lear, his Othello. We believe that Coriolanus and Antony and Cleopatra have come down to us uncorrected; that they were posthumous works; that the intellect which could not remain inactive conceived a mighty plan, of which these glorious performances were the commencement; that Shakspere, calmly meditating upon the grandeur of the Roman story, seeing how fitted it was, not only for the display of character and passion, but for profound manifestations of the aspects of social life, ever changing and ever the same, had conceived the sublime project of doing for Rome what he had done for England. He has exhibited to us the republic in her youthfulness, and her decrepitude; her struggle against the sovereignty of one; the great contest for a principle terminating in ruin; an empire established by cunning and proscription. There were, behind, the great annals of Imperial Rome; a story perhaps unequalled for the purposes of the philosophical dramatist, but one which the greatest who had ever attempted to connect the actions and motives of public men and popular bodies with lofty poetry, not didactic but "ample and

true with life," was not permitted to touch. The marvellous accuracy, the real substantial learning, of the three Roman plays of Shakspere, present the most complete evidence to our minds that they were the result of a profound study of the whole range of Roman history, including the nicer details of Roman manners, not in those days to be acquired in a compendious form, but to be brought out by diligent reading alone. It is pleasant to believe that the last years of Shakspere's life were those of an earnest student. We confidently ask if the belief is not a reasonable one?

The happy quiet of Shakspere's retreat was not wholly undisturbed by calamity, domestic and public. His brother Richard, who was ten years his junior, was buried at Stratford on the 4th of February, 1613. Of his father's family his sister Joan, who had married Mr. William Hart of Stratford, was probably the only other left. There is no record of the death of his brother Gilbert; but as he is not mentioned in the will of William, in all likelihood he died before him. Oldys, in his manuscript notes upon Langbaine, has a story of "One of Shakspeare's younger brothers, who lived to a good old age, even some years, as I compute, after the restoration of King Charles II." Gilbert was born in 1566; so that if he had lived some years after the restoration of Charles II., it is not surprising that "his memory was weakened," as Oldys reports, and that he could give "the most noted actors" but "little satisfaction in their endeavours to learn something from him of his brother." The story of Oldys is clearly apocryphal, as far as regards any brother of Shakspere's. They were a short-lived race. His sister, indeed, survived him thirty years. The family at New Place, at this period, would be composed therefore of his wife only, and his unmarried daughter Judith; unless his elder daughter and his son-in-law formed a part of the same household, with their only child Elizabeth, who was born in 1608. The public calamity to which we have alluded was a great fire, which broke out at Stratford on the 9th of July, 1614; and "within the space of two hours consumed and burnt fifty and four dwelling-houses, many of them being very fair houses, besides barns, stables, and other houses of office, together with great store of corn, hay, straw, wood, and timber therein, amounting to the value of eight hundred pounds and upwards; the force of which fire was so great (the wind setting full upon the town), that it dispersed into so many places thereof, whereby the whole town was in very great danger to have been utterly consumed."* That Shakspere assisted with all the energy of his character in alleviating the miseries of this calamity, and in the restoration of his town, we cannot doubt. In the same year we find him taking some interest in the project of an inclosure of the common-fields of Stratford. The inclosure would probably have improved his property, and especially have increased the value of the tithes, of the moiety of which he held a lease. The Corporation of Stratford were opposed to the inclosure. They held that it would be injurious to the poorer inhabitants, who were then deeply suffering from the desolation of the fire; and they appear to have been solicitous

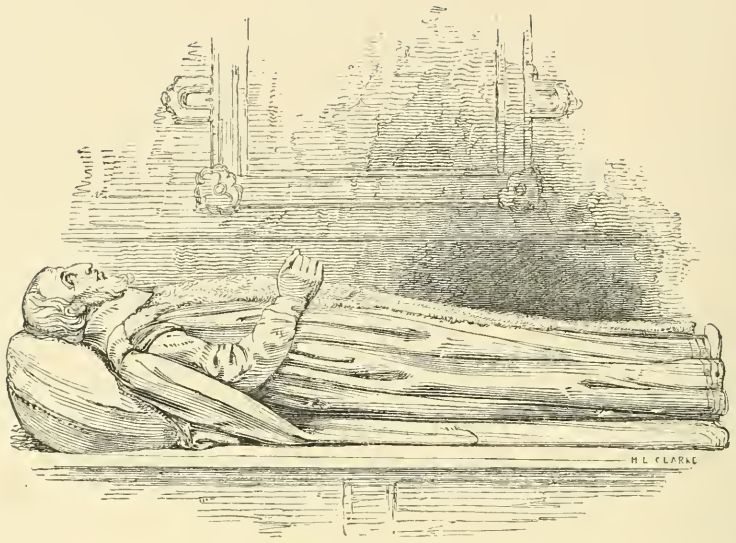
* Brief granted for the relief of the inhabitants, on the 11th of May, 1615, quoted from Wheler's History of Stratford, p. 15.

that Shakspere should take the same view of the matter as themselves. His friend William Combe, then high sheriff of the county, was a principal person engaged in forwarding the inclosure. The Corporation sent their common clerk, Thomas Greene, to London, to oppose the project; and a memorandum in his hand-writing, which still remains, exhibits the business-like manner in which Shakspere informed himself of the details of the plan. The first memorandum is dated the 17th of November, 1614, and is as follows:—"My Cosen Shakspeare comyng yesterday to town, I went to see how he did. He told me that they assured him they ment to inclose no further than to Gospel Bush, and so upp straight (leaving out pt. of the Dyngles to the field) to the gate in Clopton hedg, and take in Salisbury's peece; and that they mean in Aprill to svey. the land and then to gyve satisfaccion, and not before: and he and Mr. Hall say they think yr. will be nothyng done at all." Mr. Greene appears to have returned to Stratford in about a fortnight after the date of this memorandum, and Shakspere seems to have remained in London; for according to a second memorandum, which is damaged and partly illegible, an official letter was written to Shakspere by the Corporation, accompanied by a private letter from Mr. Greene, moving him to exert his influence against this plan of the inclosure:—"23 Dec. A. Hall, Lres. wrytten, one to Mr. Manyring—another to Mr. Shakspeare, with almost all the company's hands to eyther. I also wrytte myself to my Csn. Shakspear, the coppyes of all our . . . . . then also a note of the inconvenyences wold . . . by the inclosure." Arthur Mannering, to whom one of these letters was written by the Corporation, was officially connected with the Lord Chancellor, and then residing at his house; and from the letter to him, which has been preserved, "it appears that he was apprized of the injury to be expected from the intended inclosure; reminded of the damage that Stratford, then 'lying in the ashes of desolation,' had sustained from recent fires; and entreated to forbear the inclosure."* The letter to Shakspere has not been discovered. The fact of its having been written leaves no doubt of the importance which was attached to his opinion by his neighbours. Truly in his later years he had

"Honour, love, obedience, troops of friends."

John Combe, the old companion of Shakspere, died at the very hour that the great fire was raging at Stratford. According to the inscription on his monument, he died on the 10th of July, 1614. Upon his tomb is a fine recumbent figure executed by the same sculptor who, a few years later, set up in the same Chancel a monument to one who, "when that stone is rent," shall still be "fresh to all ages." Shakspere was at this period fifty years old. He was in all probability healthful and vigorous. His life was a pure and simple one: and its chances of endurance were the greater, that high intellectual occupation, not forced upon him by necessity, varied the even course of his tranquil existence. His retrospections of the past would, we believe, be eminently happy. His high talents had been employed not only profitably to himself, but to the

* Wheler's 'Guide to Stratford.'



[Monument of John Combe.]

advantage of his fellow-creatures. He had begun life obscurely, the member of a profession which was scarcely more than tolerated. He had found the stage brutal and licentious. There were worse faults belonging to the early drama than its ignorant coarseness. It was adapted only for a rude audience in its strong excitement and its low ribaldry. He saw that the drama was to be made a great teacher. He saw that the highest things in the region of poetry were akin to the natural feelings in the commonest natures. He would make the noblest dramatic creations the most popular. He knew that the wit that was unintelligible to the multitude was not true wit,—that the passion which did not move them to tears or anger was not real passion. He had raised a despised branch of literature into the highest art. He must have felt that he had produced works which could never die. It was not the applause of princes, or even the breath of admiring crowds, that told him this. He would look upon his own great creations as works of art, no matter by whom produced, to be compared with the performances of other men,—to be measured by that high ideal standard which was a better test than any such comparisons. Shakspere could not have mistaken his own intellectual position; for if ever there was a mind perfectly free from that self-consciousness which substitutes individual feelings for general truths, it was Shakspere's mind. To one who is perfectly familiar with his works, they come more and more to appear as emanations of the pure intellect, totally disconnected from

the personal relations of the being which has produced them. Whatever might have been the worldly trials of such a mind, it had within itself the power of rising superior to every calamity. Although the career of Shakspere was prosperous, he may have felt "the proud man's contumely," if not "the oppressor's wrong." If we are to trust his Sonnets, he did feel these things. But he dwelt habitually in a region above these clouds of common life. He suffered family bereavements; yet he chronicled not his sorrows with that false sentimentality which calls upon the world to see how graceful it is to weep. In his impersonations of feeling, he has looked at death under every aspect with which the human mind views the last great change. To the thoughtless and selfish Claudio,

> "The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ach, penury, and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death."

To the philosophical Duke life is a thing

> "That none but fools would keep."

To Hamlet, whose conscience [consciousness] "puzzles the will,"

> "The dread of something after death"

"makes cowards of us all." To Prospero the whole world is as perishable as the life of man:

> "The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit shall dissolve;
> And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Shakspere, when he speaks in a tone approaching to that of personal feeling, looks upon death with the common eye of humanity:

> "That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang
> In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west,
> Which by and by black night doth take away,
> Death's second self, that seals up all in rest."
>
> *Sonnet* lxxiii.

He dwells in the place of his birth, and when he asks, "the friends of my childhood where are they? an echo answers, where are they?" Some few remain;—the hoary-headed eld that he remembered fresh and full of hope. Ever and anon as he rambles through the villages where he rambled in his boyhood,

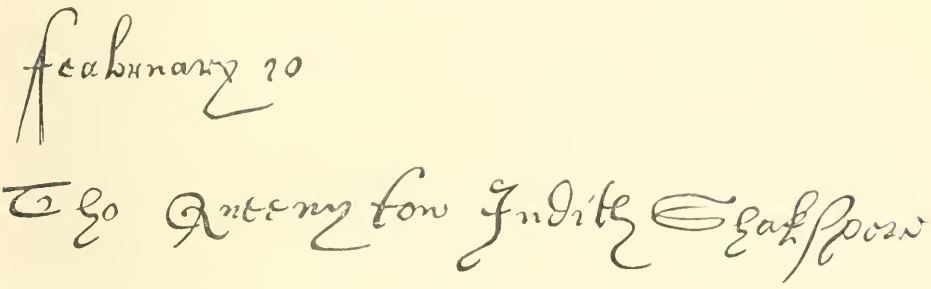
[Leicester's Hospital, Warwick.]

the head of some one is laid under the turf whose name he remembers as the foremost at barley-break or foot-ball.

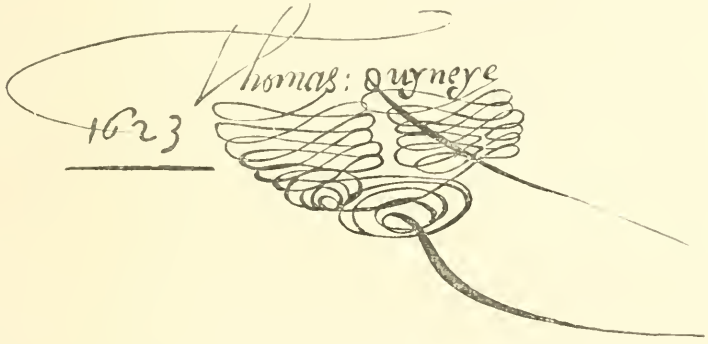
"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."

[Weston Church.]

The younger daughter of Shakspere was married on the 10th of February 1616, to Thomas Quiney, as the register of Stratford shows:



Thomas Quiney was the son of Richard Quiney of Stratford, whom we have seen in 1598 soliciting the kind offices of his loving countryman Shakspere. Thomas, who was born in 1588, was probably a well-educated man. At any rate he was a great master of calligraphy, as his signature attests:



The last will of Shakspere would appear to have been prepared in some degree with reference to this marriage. It is dated the 25th of March, 1616: but the word "Januarii" seems to have been first written and afterwards struck out, "Martii" having been written above it. It is not unlikely, and indeed it appears most probable, that the document was prepared before the marriage of Judith; for the elder daughter is mentioned as Susanna Hall,—the younger simply as Judith. To her one hundred pounds is bequeathed, and fifty pounds conditionally. The life-interest of a further sum of one hundred and fifty pounds is also bequeathed to her, with remainder to her children; but if she died without issue within three years after the date of the will, the hundred and fifty pounds was to be otherwise appropriated. We pass over the various legacies to relations and friends* to come to the bequest of the great bulk of the property. All the real estate is devised to his daughter Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natural life. It is then entailed upon her first son and his heirs male; and in default of such issue, to her second son and

* See the Will at the end of this Chapter.

his heirs male; and so on: in default of such issue, to his grand-daughter Elizabeth Hall (called in the language of the time his "niece"): and in default of such issue, to his daughter Judith, and her heirs male. By this strict entailment it was manifestly the object of Shakspere to found a family. Like many other such purposes of short-sighted humanity the object was not accomplished. His elder daughter had no issue but Elizabeth, and she died childless. The heirs male of Judith died before her. The estates were scattered after the second generation; and the descendants of his sister were the only transmitters to posterity of his blood and lineage.*

"Item, I give unto my wife my second-best bed, with the furniture." This is the clause of the will upon which, for half a century, all men believed that Shakspere recollected his wife only to mark how little he esteemed her,—to 'cut her off, not indeed with a shilling, but with an old bed."† We had the satisfaction of first showing the utter groundlessness of this opinion; and it is pleasant to know, that the statement which we originally published, some twenty years ago, is now fully acquiesced in by all writers on Shakspere. But it was once very different. To show the universality of the former belief in such a charge, we will first exhibit it in the words of one, himself a poet, who cannot be suspected of any desire to depreciate the greatest master of his art. Mr. Moore, in his "Life of Byron," speaking of unhappy marriages with reference to the domestic misfortune of his noble friend, thus expresses himself:—

"By whatever austerity of temper, or habits, the poets Dante and Milton may have drawn upon themselves such a fate, it might be expected that, at least, the 'gentle Shakspere' would have stood exempt from the common calamity of his brethren. But, among the very few facts of his life that have been transmitted to us, there is none more clearly proved than the unhappiness of his marriage. The dates of the births of his children, compared with that of his removal from Stratford,—the total omission of his wife's name in the first draft of his will, and the bitter sarcasm of the bequest by which he remembers her afterwards, all prove beyond a doubt both his separation from the lady early in life, and his unfriendly feeling towards her at the close of it. In endeavouring to argue against the conclusion naturally to be deduced from this will, Boswell, with a strange ignorance of human nature, remarks,—'If he had taken offence at any part of his wife's conduct, I cannot believe he would have taken this petty mode of expressing it.'"

Steevens, amongst many faults of taste, has the good sense and the good feeling to deny the inferences of Malone in this matter of the "old bed." He considers this bequest "a mark of peculiar tenderness;" and he assumes that she was provided for by settlement. Steevens was a convevancer by profession. Malone, who was also at the bar, says, "what provision was made for her by settlement does not appear." A writer in "Lardner's Cyclopædia" doubts the legal view of the matter which Steevens charitably takes:—"Had he already provided for her? If so, he would surely have alluded to the fact; and if he had left her the interest of a specific sum, or the rent of some messuage, there would, we think, have been a stipulation for the reversion of the property to his children after her decease.'

* See note on some points of Shakspere's Will at the end of this Chapter.

† Malone.

Boswell, a third legal editor, thus writes upon the same subject :—"*If* we may suppose that some provision had been made for her during his lifetime, the bequest of his second-best bed was probably considered in those days neither as uncommon or reproachful." As a somewhat parallel example Boswell cites the will of Sir Thomas Lucy, in 1600, who gives his son his second-best horse, but no land, because his father-in-law had promised to provide for him. We will present our readers with a case in which the parallel is much closer. In the will of David Cecil, Esq., grandfather to the great Lord Burleigh, we find the following bequest to his wife :—

"*Item—I will that my wife have all the plate that was hers before I married her; and twenty kye and a bull.*"*

Our readers will recollect the query of the Cyclopædist,—"Had he already provided for her? If so, he would surely have alluded to the fact." Poor Dame Cecil, according to this interpretation, had no resource but that of milking her twenty kye, kept upon the common, and eating sour curds out of a silver bowl.

The "forgetfulness" and the "neglect" by Shakspere of the partner of his fortunes for more than thirty years is good-naturedly imputed by Steevens to "the indisposed and sickly fit." Malone will not have it so :—"The various regulations and provisions of our author's will show that at the time of making it *he had the entire use of his faculties.*" We thoroughly agree with Malone in this particular. Shakspere bequeaths to his second daughter three hundred pounds under certain conditions; to his sister money, wearing apparel, and a life interest in the house where she lives; to his nephews five pounds each; to his grand-daughter his plate; to the poor ten pounds; to various friends, money, rings, his sword. The chief bequest, that of his *real* property, is as follows :—

"Item—I give, will, bequeath, and devise, unto my daughter, Susanna Hall, for better enabling of her to perform this my will, and towards the performance thereof, all that capital messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, in Stratford aforesaid, called the New Place, wherein I now dwell, and two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley Street, within the borough of Stratford aforesaid; and all my barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements, hereditaments whatsoever, situate, lying, and being, or to be had, received, perceived, or taken, within the towns, hamlets, villages, fields, and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, or in any of them, in the said county of Warwick; and also that messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, wherein one John Robinson dwelleth, situate, lying, and being in the Blackfriars in London, near the Wardrobe; and all other my lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever: to have and to hold all and singular the said premises, with their appurtenances, unto the said Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natura life; and after her decease to the first son of her body lawfully issuing," &c.

Immediately after this clause,—by which all the *real* property is bequeathed to Susanna Hall, for her life, and then entailed upon her heirs male; and in default of such issue upon his grand-daughter, and her heirs male; and in default of such issue upon his daughter Judith and her heirs male,—comes the clause relating to his wife :—

* Peck's 'Desiderata Curiosa,' lib. iii., No. 2.

"*Item—I give unto my wife my second-best bed, with the furniture.*"

It was the object of Shakspere by this will to perpetuate *a family estate*. In doing so did he neglect the duty and affection which he owed to his wife? He did not.

Shakspere knew the law of England better than his legal commentators. His estates, with the exception of a copyhold tenement, expressly mentioned in his will, were *freehold*. His wife was entitled to DOWER. She was provided for, as the wife of David Cecil was provided for, who, without doubt, was not "cut off" with her own plate and twenty kye and a bull. She was provided for amply, *by the clear and undeniable operation of the English law*. Of the lands, houses, and gardens which Shakspere *inherited* from his father, she was assured of the life-interest of a third, should she survive her husband, the instant that old John Shakspere died. Of the capital messuage, called New Place, the best house in Stratford, which Shakspere purchased in 1597, she was assured of the same life-interest, from the moment of the conveyance, provided it was a direct conveyance to her husband. That it was so conveyed we may infer from the terms of the conveyance of the lands in Old Stratford, and other places, which were purchased by Shakspere in 1602, and were then conveyed "to the onlye proper use and behoofe of the saide William Shakespere, his heires and assignes, for ever." Of a life-interest in a third of these lands also was she assured. The tenement in Blackfriars, purchased in 1614, was conveyed to Shakspere and *three other persons;* and after his death was re-conveyed by those persons to the uses of his will, "for and in performance of the confidence and trust in them reposed by William Shakespeare deceased." In this estate certainly the widow of our poet had not dower. The reason is pretty clear—it was theatrical property. It has been remarked to us that even the express mention of the second-best bed was anything but unkindness and insult; that the best bed was in all probability an heir-loom: it might have descended to Shakspere himself from his father as an heir-loom, and, as such, was the property of his own heirs. The best bed was considered amongst the most important of those chattels which went to the heir by custom with the house. "And note that in some places chattels as heir-looms (as the best bed, table, pot, pan, cart, and other dead chattels moveable) may go to the heir, and the heir in that case may have an action for them at the common law, and shall not sue for them in the ecclesiastical court; but the heir-loom is due by custom, and not by the common law." *

It is unnecessary for us more minutely to enter into the question before us. It is sufficient for us to have the satisfaction of having first pointed out the *absolute certainty* that the wife of Shakspere was provided for by the natural operation of the law of England. She could not have been deprived of this provision except by the legal process of Fine,—the *voluntary* renunciation of her own right. If her husband had alienated his real estates she might still have held her right, even against a purchaser. In the event, which we believe to be improbable, that she and the "gentle Shakspere" lived on terms of mutual unkindness, she would have refused to renounce the right which the law gave her. In the more probable case, that, surrounded with mutual friends and relations, they lived at least amicably, she could not have been asked to resign it. In the most probable case, that they lived

* 'Coke upon Littleton,' 18 b.

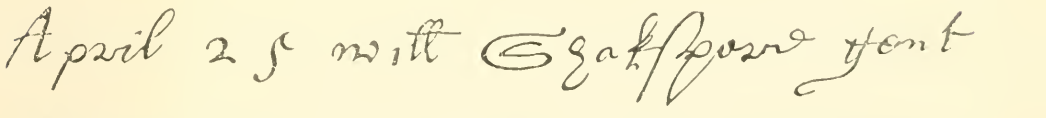
affectionately, the legal provision of dower would have been regarded as the natural and proper arrangement—so natural and usual as not to be referred to in a will. By reference to other wills of the same period it may be seen how unusual it was to make any other provision for a wife than by *dower*. Such a provision in those days, when the bulk of property was *real*, was a matter of course. The solution which we have here offered to this long-disputed question supersedes the necessity of any *conjecture* as to the nature of the provision which those who reverence the memory of Shakspere *must* hold he made for his wife. Amongst those conjectures the most plausible has proceeded from the zealous desire of Mr. Brown* to remove an unmerited stigma from the memory of our poet. He believes that provision was made for Shakspere's widow through his theatrical property, which he imagines was assigned to her. Such a conjecture, true as it may still be, is not necessary for the vindication of Shakspere's sense of justice. We are fortunate in having first presented the true solution of the difficulty. There are lines in Shakspere familiar to all, which would have pointed to it:—

> "Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
> Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
> Another moon; but, oh! methinks how slow
> This old moon wanes! she lingers my desires
> Like to a step-dame, or a DOWAGER†
> Long withering out a young man's revenue."
>
> *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I. Sc. I.

The will of Shakspere thus commences:—"I, William Shakspere, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gent., in perfect health and memory, (God be praised!) do make and ordain this my last will and testament." And yet within one month of this declaration William Shakspere is no more:

OBIIT ANO. DOI. 1616. ÆTATIS 53. DIE 23. AP.

Such is the inscription on his tomb. It is corroborated by the register of his burial:—

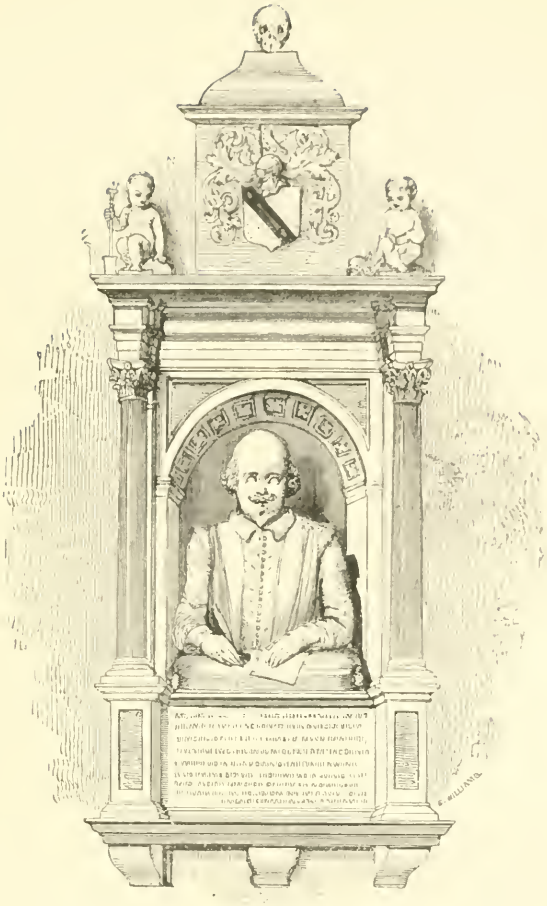


Writing forty-six years after the event, the vicar of Stratford says, "Shakspere, Drayton, and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakspere died of a fever there contracted." A tradition of this nature, surviving its object nearly half a century, is not much to be relied on. But if it were absolutely true, our reverence for Shakspere would not be diminished by the fact that he accelerated his end in the exercise of hospitality, according to the manner of his age, towards two of the most illustrious of his friends. The "merry meeting," the last of many social hours spent with the full-hearted Jonson and the elegant Drayton, may be contemplated without a painful feel-

* 'Shakspere's Autobiographical Poems.

† *Dowager* is here used in the original sense of a widow receiving *dower* out of the "revenue" which has descended to the heir with this customary charge.

ing. Shakspere possessed a mind eminently social—"he was of a free and generous nature." But, says the tradition of half a century, "he drank too hard" at this "merry meeting." We believe that this is the vulgar colouring of a common incident. He "died of a fever there contracted." The fever that is too often the attendant upon a hot spring, when the low grounds upon a river bank have been recently inundated, is a fever that the good people of Stratford did not well understand at that day. The "merry meeting" rounded off a tradition much more effectively. Whatever was the immediate cause of his last illness, we may well believe that the closing scene was full of tranquillity and hope; and that he who had sought, perhaps more than any man, to look beyond the material and finite things of the world, should rest at last in the "peace which passeth all understanding"—in that assured belief which the opening of his will has expressed with far more than formal solemnity:—"I commend my soul into the hands of God my creator, hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting."



[Monument at Stratford.]

SHAKSPERE'S WILL.

"*Vicesimo quinto die Martii, Anno Regni Domini nostri Jacobi nunc Regis Angliæ, &c. decimo quarto, et Scotiæ quadragesimo nono. Anno Domini* 1616.

"In the name of God, Amen. I, William Shakspere, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gent., in perfect health and memory, (God be praised!) do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following; that is to say:

"*First*, I commend my soul into the hands of God my creator, hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting; and my body to the earth whereof it is made.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto my daughter Judith one hundred and fifty pounds of lawful English money, to be paid unto her in manner and form following; that is to say, one hundred

pounds in discharge of her marriage portion within one year after my decease, with consideration after the rate of two shillings in the pound for so long time as the same shall be unpaid unto her after my decease; and the fifty pounds residue thereof, upon her surrendering of, or giving of such sufficient security as the overseers of this my will shall like of, to surrender or grant, all her estate and right that shall descend or come unto her after my decease, or that she now hath, of, in, or to, one copyhold tenement, with the appurtenances, lying and being in Stratford-upon-Avon aforesaid, in the said county of Warwick, being parcel or holden of the manor of Rowington, unto my daughter Susanna Hall, and her heirs for ever.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto my said daughter Judith one hundred and fifty pounds more, if she, or any issue of her body, be living at the end of three years next ensuing the day of the date of this my will, during which time my executors to pay her consideration from my decease according to the rate aforesaid: and if she die within the said term without issue of her body, then my will is, and I do give and bequeath one hundred pounds thereof to my niece Elizabeth Hall, and the fifty pounds to be set forth by my executors during the life of my sister Joan Hart, and the use and profit thereof coming, shall be paid to my said sister Joan, and after her decease the said fifty pounds shall remain amongst the children of my said sister, equally to be divided amongst them; but if my said daughter Judith be living at the end of the said three years, or any issue of her body, then my will is, and so I devise and bequeath, the said hundred and fifty pounds to be set out by my executors and overseers for the best benefit of her and her issue, and the stock not to be paid unto her so long as she shall be married and covert baron; but my will is, that she shall have the consideration yearly paid unto her during her life, and after her decease the said stock and consideration to be paid to her children, if she have any, and if not, to her executors or assigns, she living the said term after my decease: provided that if such husband as she shall at the end of the said three years be married unto, or at any [time] after, do sufficiently assure unto her, and the issue of her body, lands answerable to the portion by this my will given unto her, and to be adjudged so by my executors and overseers, then my will is, that the said hundred and fifty pounds shall be paid to such husband as shall make such assurance, to his own use.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto my said sister Joan twenty pounds, and all my wearing apparel, to be paid and delivered within one year after my decease; and I do will and devise unto her the house, with the appurtenances, in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her natural life, under the yearly rent of twelve-pence.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto her three sons, William Hart, —— Hart, and Michael Hart, five pounds apiece, to be paid within one year after my decease.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto the said Elizabeth Hall all my plate (except my broad silver and gilt bowl) that I now have at the date of this my will.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto the poor of Stratford aforesaid ten pounds; to Mr. Thomas Combe my sword; to Thomas Russel, esq., five pounds; and to Francis Collins of the borough of Warwick, in the county of Warwick, gent., thirteen pounds six shillings and eight-pence, to be paid within one year after my decease.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath to Hamlet [*Hamnet*] Sadler twenty-six shillings eight-pence, to buy him a ring; to William Reynolds, gent., twenty-six shillings eight-pence, to buy him a ring; to my godson William Walker, twenty shillings in gold; to Anthony Nash, gent., twenty-six shillings eight-pence; and to Mr. John Nash, twenty-six shillings eight-pence; and to my fellows, John Hemynge, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell, twenty-six shillings eight-pence apiece, to buy them rings.

"*Item*, I give, will, bequeath, and devise, unto my daughter Susanna Hall, for better enabling of her to perform this my will, and towards the performance thereof, all that capital messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, in Stratford aforesaid, called the New Place, wherein I now dwell, and two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley Street, within the borough of Stratford aforesaid; and all my barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever, situate, lying, and being, or to be had, received, perceived, or taken, within the towns, hamlets, villages, fields, and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, or in any of them, in the said county of Warwick; and also all that messuage or tenement, with the appurten-

ances, wherein one John Robinson dwelleth, situate, lying, and being, in the Blackfriars in London, near the Wardrobe; and all other my lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever; to have and to hold all and singular the said premises, with their appurtenances, unto the said Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natural life; and after her decease to the first son of her body lawfully issuing, and to the heirs males of the body of the said first son lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, to the second son of her body lawfully issuing, and to the heirs males of the body of the said second son lawfully issuing; and for default of such heirs, to the third son of the body of the said Susanna lawfully issuing, and to the heirs males of the body of the said third son lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, the same so to be and remain to the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sons of her body, lawfully issuing one after another, and to the heirs males of the bodies of the said fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sons lawfully issuing, in such manner as it is before limited to be and remain to the first, second, and third sons of her body, and to their heirs males; and for default of such issue, the said premises to be and remain to my said niece Hall, and the heirs males of her body lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, to my daughter Judith, and the heirs males of her body lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, to the right heirs of me the said William Shakspeare for ever.

"*Item*, I give unto my wife my second best bed, with the furniture.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath to my said daughter Judith my broad silver gilt bowl. All the rest of my goods, chattels, leases, plate, jewels, and household-stuff whatsoever, after my debts and legacies paid, and my funeral expenses discharged, I give, devise, and bequeath to my son-in-law, John Hall, gent., and my daughter Susanna his wife, whom I ordain and make executors of this my last will and testament. And I do entreat and appoint the said Thomas Russel, esq., and Francis Collins, gent., to be overseers hereof. And do revoke all former wills, and publish this to be my last will and testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand, the day and year first above-written.

"By me, William Shakspere.

"*Witness to the publishing hereof,*

FRA. COLLYNS,
JULIUS SHAW,
JOHN ROBINSON.
HAMNET SADLER,
ROBERT WHATTCOAT.

"*Probatum fuit testamentum suprascriptum apud London, coram Magistro William Byrde, Legum Doctore, &c. vicesimo secundo die mensis Junii, Anno Domini* 1616; *juramento Johannis Hall unius ex. cui, &c. de bene, &c. jurat. reservata potestate, &c. Susannæ Hall, alt. ex. &c. eam cum venerit, &c. petitur, &c.*"

NOTE ON SOME POINTS OF SHAKSPERE'S WILL.

THE solemn clause, "My body to the earth whereof it is made," was carried into effect by the burial of William Shakspere in the chancel of his parish church. A tomb of which we shall presently speak more particularly, was erected to his memory before 1623. The following lines are inscribed beneath the bust:—

"IVDICIO PYLIVM, GENIO SOCRATEM, ARTE MARONEM,
TERRA TEGIT, POPVLVS MÆRET, OLYMPVS HABET.

STAY, PASSENGER, WHY GOEST THOV BY SO FAST,
READ, IF THOV CANST, WHOM ENVIOVS DEATH HATH PLAST
WITHIN THIS MONVMENT, SHAKSPEARE, WITH WHOME
QVICK NATVRE DIDE; WHOSE NAME DOTH DECK YS. TOMBE
FAR MORE THEN COST; SITH ALL YT. HE HATH WRITT
LEAVES LIVING ART BVT PAGE TO SERVE HIS WITT.
OBIIT ANO. DOI. 1616. ÆTATIS 53. DIE 23. AP."

Below the monument, but at a few paces from the wall, is a flat stone, with the following extraordinary inscription:—

GOOD FREND FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE
TO DIGG T—E DUST ENCLOASED HE.RE.
BLESE BE T—E MAN $\frac{T}{Y}$ SPARES T—ES STONES
AND CURST BE HE $\frac{T}{Y}$ MOVES MY BONES.

In a letter from Warwickshire, in 1693,* the writer, after describing the monument to Shakspere, and giving its inscription, says, "Near the wall where this monument is erected lie the plain free-stone underneath which his body is buried, with this epitaph made by himself a little before his death." He then gives the epitaph, and subsequently adds, "Not one for fear of the curse above-said dare touch his grave-stone, though his wife and daughters did earnestly desire to be laid in the same grave with him." This information is given by the tourist upon the authority of the clerk who showed him the church, who "was above eighty years old." Here is unquestionable authority for the existence of this free-stone seventy-seven years after the death of Shakspere. We have an earlier authority. In a plate to Dugdale's 'Antiquities of Warwickshire,' first published in 1656, we have a representation of Shakspere's tomb, with the following:—"Neare the wall where this monument is erected lyeth a plain free-stone, underneath which his body is buried, with this epitaph—

"Good frend," &c.

But it is very remarkable, we think, that this plain free-stone does not bear the name of Shakspere—has nothing to establish the fact that the stone originally belonged to his grave. We apprehend that during the period that elapsed between his death and the setting-up of the monument, a stone was temporarily placed over the grave; and that the warning not to touch the bones was the stone-mason's invention, to secure their reverence till a fitting monument should be prepared, if the stone were not ready in his yard to serve for any grave. We quite agree with Mr. De Quincey that this doggrel attributed to Shakspere is "equally below his intellect no less than his scholarship," and we hold with him that "as a sort of *sistè viator* appeal to future sextons, it is worthy of the grave-digger or the parish clerk, who was probably its author."

The bequest of the second-best bed to his wife was an interlineation in Shakspere's Will. "He had forgot her," says Malone. There was another bequest which was also an interlineation

* Published from the original manuscript by Mr. Rodd, 1838.

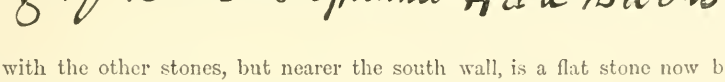
'To my fellows, John Hemynge, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell, twenty-six shillings eightpence apiece, to buy them rings." It is not unlikely that these companions of his professional life derived substantial advantages from his death, and probably paid him an annuity after his retirement. The bequest of the rings marked his friendship to them, as the bequest of the bed his affection to his wife. She died on the 6th of August, 1623, and was buried on the 8th, according to the register—

Her grave-stone is next to the stone with the doggrel inscription, but nearer to the north wall, upon which Shakspere's monument is placed. The stone has a brass plate, with the following inscription:—

"Heere lyeth interred the bodye of Anne, wife of Mr. William Shakespeare, who depted. this life the 6th day of Avgvst, 1623, being of the age of 67 yeares."

"Vbera, tu mater, tu lac vitamq. dedisti,
Væ mihi; pro tanto munere Saxa dabo!
Quam mallem, amouеat lapidem, bonus Angel' ore'
Exeat ut Christi Corpus, imago tua?
Sed nil vota valent, venias cito Christe resurget,
Clausa licet tumulo mater, et astra petet."

It is evident that the epitaph was intended to express the deep affection of her daughter, to whom Shakspere bequeathed a life interest in his real property, and the bulk of his personal. The widow of Shakspere in all likelihood resided with this elder daughter. It is possible that they formed one family previous to his death. That daughter died on the 11th of July, 1649, having survived her husband, Dr. Hall, fourteen years. She is described as widow in the register of burials:—



Ranging with the other stones, but nearer the south wall, is a flat stone now bearing the following inscription:—

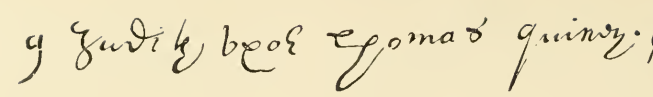
"Heere lyeth ye. body of Svsanna, wife to John Hall, Gent. ye. davghter of William Shakespeare, Gent. She deceased ye. 11th of Jvly, Ao. 1649, aged 66."

On the same stone is an inscription for Richard Watts, who had no relationship to Shakspere or his descendants. Fortunately Dugdale has preserved an inscription which the masons of Stratford obliterated, to make room for the record of Richard Watts, who has thus attained a distinction to which he had no claim:

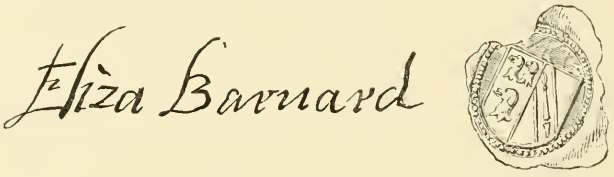
"Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,
Wise to Salvation was good Mistris Hall,
Something of Shakespere was in that, but this
Wholy of him with whom she's now in blisse.

Then, passenger, ha'st ne're a teare.
To weepe with her that wept with all?
That wept, yet set herselfe to chere
Them up with comforts cordiall.
Her love shall live, her mercy spread,
When thou hast ne're a teare to shed."

Judith, the second daughter of Shakspere, lived till 1662. She was buried on the 9th of February of that year.



Her married life must have been one of constant affliction in the bereavement of her children. Her first son, who was named Shakspere, was born in November, 1616, and died in May, 1617. Her second son, Richard, was born in February, 1618, and died in February, 1639. Her third son, Thomas, was born in August, 1619, and died in January, 1639. Thus perished all of the second branch of the heirs male of William Shakspere. His grand-daughter Elizabeth, the only child of his daughter Susanna, was married in 1626, when she was eighteen years of age, to Mr. Thomas Nash, a native of Stratford. He died in 1647, leaving no children. She remained a widow about two years, having married, on the 5th of June, 1649, Mr. John Barnard of Abington, near Northampton. He was a widower with a large family. They were married at Billesley, near Stratford. Her husband was created a knight by Charles II. in 1661. The grand-daughter of Shakspere died in February, 1670, and was buried at Abington. Her signature, with a seal, the same as that used by her mother,—the arms of Hall impaled with those of Shakspere, is affixed to a deed of appointment in the possession of Mr. Wheler of Stratford. She left no issue.



We have seen that all the sons of Judith Quiney were dead at the commencement of 1639. Shakspere's elder daughter and grand-daughter were therefore at liberty to treat the property as their own by the usual processes of law. The mode in which they, in the first instance, made it subservient to their family arrangements is thus clearly stated by Mr. Wheler, in an interesting tract on the birth-place of Shakspere:—"By a deed of the 27th of May, 1639, and a fine and recovery (Trinity and Michaelmas Terms, 15th Charles I.), Mrs. Susannah Hall, Shakspere's eldest daughter, with Thomas Nash, Esq., and Elizabeth his wife (Mrs. Hall's only child), confirmed this and our bard's other estates to Mrs. Hall for her life, and afterwards settled them upon Mr. and Mrs. Nash, and her issue; but in the event of her leaving no family, then upon Mr. Nash. As, however, Mr. Nash died 4th April, 1647, without issue, a resettlement of the property was immediately adopted, to prevent its falling to the heir of Mr. Nash, who had, by his will of the 26th of August, 1642, devised his reversionary interest in the principal part of Shakspere's estates to his cousin Edward Nash. By a subsequent settlement, therefore, of the 2nd of June, 1647, and by another fine and recovery (Easter and Michaelmas Terms, 23rd Charles I.), Shakspere's natal place and his other estates were again limited to the bard's descendants, restoring to Mrs. Nash the ultimate power over the property." Upon the second marriage of Shakspere's grand-daughter other arrangements were made, in the usual form of fine and recovery, by which New Place, and all the other property which she inherited of William Shakspere, her grandfather, were settled to the use of John Barnard and Elizabeth his wife, for the term of their natural lives; then to the heirs of the said Elizabeth; and in default of such issue to the use of such person, and for such estate, as the said Elizabeth shall appoint by any writing, either purporting to be her last will or otherwise. She did make her last will on the 29th of January, 1669; according to which, after the death of Sir John Barnard, the property was to be sold. Thus, in half a century, the estates of Shakspere were scattered and went out of his family, with the exception of the two houses in Henley Street, where he is held to have been born, which Lady Barnard devised to her kinsman Thomas Hart, the grandson of Shakspere's sister Joan. Those who are curious to trace the continuity of the line of the Harts will find very copious extracts from the Stratford registers in Boswell's edition of Malone.

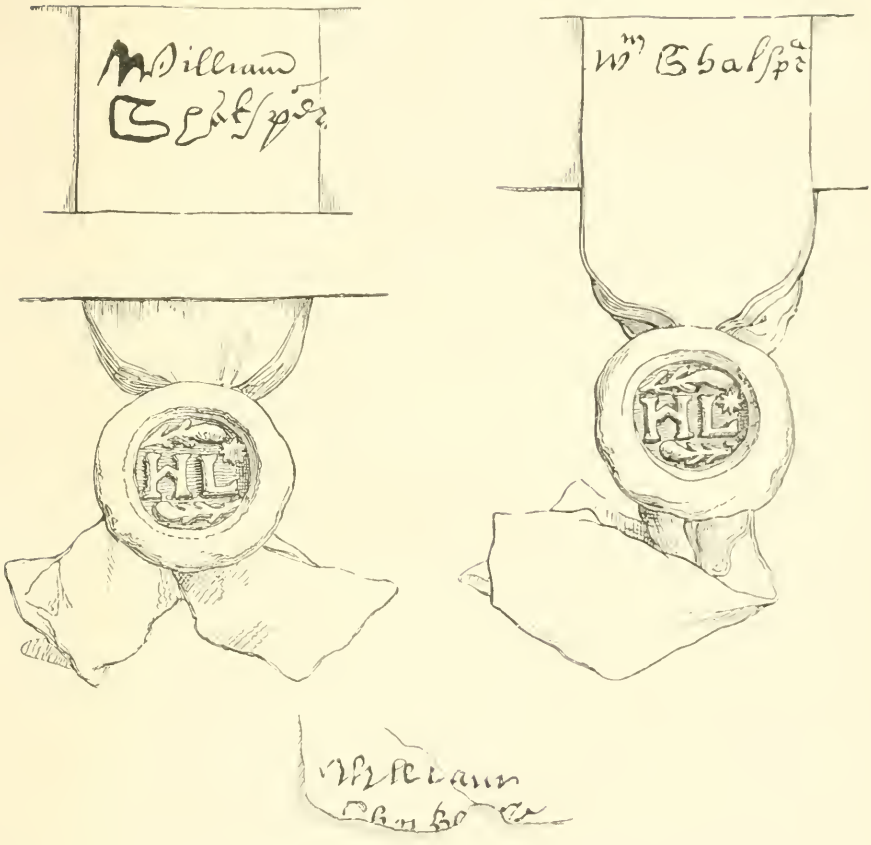
NOTE ON THE AUTOGRAPHS OF SHAKSPERE.

The will of Shakspere, preserved in the Prerogative Office, Doctors' Commons, is written upon three sheets of paper. The name is subscribed at the right-hand corner of the first sheet; at the left-hand corner of the second sheet; and immediately before the names of the witnesses upon the third sheet. These signatures, engraved from a tracing by Steevens, were first published in 1778. The first signature has been much damaged since it was originally traced by Steevens. It was for a long time thought that in the first and second of these signatures the poet had written his name *Shakspere*, but in the third *Shakspeare;* and Steevens and Malone held, therefore, that they had authority in the handwriting of the poet for uniformly spelling his name *Shakspeare*. They rested this mode of spelling the name not upon the mode in which it was usually printed during the poet's life, and especially in the genuine editions of his own works, which mode was *Shakespeare*, but upon this signature to the last sheet of his will, which they fancied contained an *a* in the last syllable. When William Henry Ireland, in 1795, produced his 'Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments,' it was necessary that he should fabricate Shakspere's name, and the engraving published by Steevens enabled him to do so. He varied the spelling, as he found it said to be varied in the signatures to the will; but he more commonly spelt the name with the *a* in the final syllable. His confidence in the Shakspere editors supplied one of the means for his detection. Malone, in his 'Inquiry,' published in 1796, has a confession upon this subject, which is almost as curious as any one of Ireland's own confessions:—"In the year 1776 Mr. Steevens, in my presence, traced with the utmost accuracy the three signatures affixed by the poet to his will. While two of these manifestly appeared to us Shakspere, we conceived that in the third there was a variation; and that in the second syllable an *a* was found. *Accordingly we have constantly so exhibited the poet's name ever since that time.* It ought certainly to have struck us as a very extraordinary circumstance, that a man should write his name twice one way, and once another, on the same paper: however, it did not; and I had no suspicion of our mistake till, about three years ago, I received a very sensible letter from an anonymous correspondent, who showed me very clearly that, though there was a superfluous stroke when the poet came to write the letter *r* in his last signature, probably from the tremor of his hand, there was no *a* discoverable in that syllable; and that this name, like both the other, was written 'Shakspere.' Revolving this matter in my mind, *it occurred to me, that in the new fac-simile of his name which I gave in* 1790, *my engraver had made a mistake in placing an* a *over the name which was there exhibited,* and that what was supposed to be that letter was only a mark of abbreviation, with a turn or curl at the first part of it, which gave it the appearance of a letter. . . . If Mr. Steevens and I had maliciously intended to lay a trap for this fabricator to fall into, we could not have done the business more adroitly." The new fac-simile to which Malone here alludes continued to be given with the *a* over the name, in subsequent editions; and we have no alternative but to copy it from the engraving. It was taken from the mortgage deed executed by Shakspere on the 11th of March, 1613.* When Malone's engraver turned the *re* of that signature into an *a*, the deed was in the possession of Mr. Albany Wallis, a solicitor. It was subsequently presented to Garrick; but after his death was nowhere to be found. Malone, however, traced that the counterpart of the deed of bargain and sale, dated the 10th of March, 1613, was also in the possession of Mr. Wallis; and he corrected his former error by engraving the signature to that deed in his 'Inquiry.' He says, "Notwithstanding this authority, I shall still continue to write our poet's name *Shakspeare*, for reasons which I have

* See Note at the end of Chapter XI.

assigned in his Life. But whether in doing so I am right or wrong, it is manifest that he wrote it himself *Shakspere;* and therefore if any original Letter or other MS. of his shall ever be discovered, his name will appear in that form." This prophecy has been partly realized. The autograph of Shakspere, corresponding in its orthography with the other documents, was found in a small folio volume, the first edition of Florio's translation of Montaigne, having been sixty years in the possession of the Rev. Edward Patteson, minister of Smethwick, near Birmingham. In 1838 the volume was sold by auction, and purchased by the British Museum for one hundred pounds. The deed of bargain and sale, the signature of which was copied by Malone in 1796, was sold by auction in 1841, and was purchased by the Corporation of London for one hundred and forty-five pounds. The purchase was denounced in the Court of Common Council as "a most wasteful and prodigal expenditure;" but it was defended upon the ground that "it was not very likely that the purchase of the autograph would be acted upon as a precedent, for Shakspere stood alone in the history of the literature of the world." Honoured be those who have thus shown a reverence for the name of Shakspere! It is a symptom of returning health in the Corporation of London, after a long plethora, which might have ended in sudden death. In former ages she has been the assertor of liberty and the encourager of learning. She has called in the poet to her pageants and the painter to her high festivals. In later times her state and ancientry have been child's play and burlesque If the altered spirit of the majority is willing thus to reverence the symbol of the highest literature, in Shakspere's autograph, that spirit will lead to a wise employment of the civic riches, in the encouragement of intellectual efforts in their own day. This was written in 1843. There are evidences of a better spirit, such as is evinced in the City Library, a most valuable institution, freely opened to men of letters.

We subjoin fac-similes of the six authentic autographs of Shakspere. That at the head of the page is from the Montaigne of Florio; the left, with the seal, is from the counterpart of the Conveyance in the possession of the Corporation of London; the right, with the seal, is from Malone's fac-simile of the Mortgage-deed which has been lost; the three others are from the three sheets of the will.



STRATFORD REGISTERS.

BAPTISMS.

1558 Septēber 15 . . . . Jone Shakspere daughter to John Shakspere.
1562 December 2 . . . . Margareta filia Johannis Shakspere.
1564 April 26 . . . . . Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere.
1566 October 13 . . . . Gilbertus filius Johannis Shakspe re.
1569 April 15 . . . . . Ione the daughter of John Shakspere
1571 Septēb 28 . . . . . Anna filia Magistri Shakspere.
1573 [1573–4] March 11 . . Richard sonne to Mr. John Shakspeer.
1580 May 3 . . . . . Edmund sonne to Mr. John Shakspere.
1583 May 26 . . . . . Susanna daughter to William Shakspere.
1584 [1584–5] February 2 . Hamnet & Iudeth sonne & daughter to Williā Shakspere.

There are then entries of Ursula, 1588; Humphrey, 1590; Philippus, 1591;– children of John Shakspere (not *Mr.*)

MARRIAGES.

1607 Junii 5 . . . . . John Hall gentlemā & Susanna Shaxspere.
1615 [1615–6] February 10. Tho: Queeny tow Judith Shakspere.

BURIALS.

1563 April 30 . . . . . Margaret filia Johannis Shakspere.
1579 April 4 . . . . . Anne daughter to Mr. John Shakspere.
1596 August 11 . . . . . Hamnet filius William Shakspere.
1601 Septemb 8. . . . . Mr. Johānes Shakspeare.
1608 Sept 9 . . . . . Mayry Shaxspere, Widowe.
1612 [1612–13] February 4. Rich. Shakspeare.
1616 April 25 . . . . . Will: Shakspere, Gent.
1623 August 8 . . . . . Mrs. Shakspeare.
1649 July 16. . . . . Mrs. Susanna Hall, Widow.
1661 [1661–2] Feb. 9. . . Judith uxor Thomas Quiney.

*** It appears by the Register of Burials that Dr. Hall, one of the sons-in-law of William Shakspere, was buried on the 26th November, 1635. He is described in the entry as "Medicus peritissimus." The Register contains no entry of the burial of Thomas Quiney. Elizabeth, the daughter of John and Susanna Hall, was baptized February 21, 1607 [1607–8]; and she is mentioned in her illustrious grandfather's will. The children of Judith, who was only married two months before the death of her father, appear to have been three sons, all of whom died before their mother.

[Roubiliac's bust.

NOTE ON THE PORTRAITS OF SHAKSPERE.

The title-page to this volume, which has been engraved by Mr. Thompson in a style that carries the powers of wood-engraving as far as they can go, contains five portraits of Shakspere. There are several other portraits which are held to be authentic; and many which bear the imputation of being forgeries. Volumes have been written on the subject of the genuineness of Shakspere's portraits. We shall only attempt a very brief notice of those which we now publish. The design over the title of the volume exhibits the bust upon Shakspere's Monument in three several positions. The sculptor of that monument was Gerard Johnson. The tomb itself is accurately represented at the head of Shakspere's Will. We learn the name of the sculptor from Dugdale's correspondence, published by Mr. Hamper in 1827; and we collect from the verses by Leonard Digges, prefixed to the first edition of Shakspere, that it was erected previous to 1623:—

> "Shakespeare, at length thy pious fellows give
> The world thy works: thy works by which outlive
> Thy tomb thy name must: when that stone is rent,
> And time dissolves thy Stratford monument,
> Here we alive shall view thee still. This book,
> When brass and marble fade, shall make thee look
> Fresh to all ages."

The fate of this portrait of Shakspere, for we may well account it as such, is a singular one. Mr. Britton, who has on many occasions manifested an enthusiastic feeling for the associations belonging to the great poet, published in 1816 'Remarks on his Monumental Bust,' from which we extract the following passage:—"The bust is the size of life; it is formed out of a block of soft stone; and was originally painted over in imitation of nature. The hands and face were of flesh colour, the eyes of a light hazel, and the hair and beard auburn; the doublet or coat was scarlet, and covered with a loose black gown, or tabard, without sleeves; the upper part of the cushion was green, the under half crimson, and the tassels gilt. Such appear to have been the original features of this important, but neglected or insulted bust. After remaining in this state above one hundred and twenty years, Mr. John Ward, grandfather to Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kemble, caused it to be 'repaired,' and the original colours preserved, in 1748, from the profits of the representation of Othello. This was a generous, and apparently judicious act; and therefore very unlike the next

alteration it was subjected to in 1793. In that year Mr. Malone caused the bust to be covered over with one or more coats of white paint; and thus at once destroyed its original character, and greatly injured the expression of the face." It is fortunate that we live in an age when no such unscrupulous insolence as that of Malone can be again tolerated.

The small head to the right of the bust, engraved from the little print, by WILLIAM MARSHALL, prefixed to the edition of Shakspere's poems in 1640, is considered amongst the genuine portraits of Shakspere. It is probably reduced, with alterations, from the print by MARTIN DROESHOUT, which is prefixed to the folio of 1623. This portrait appears at the bottom of our title. The original engraving is not a good one; and as the plate furnished the portraits to three subsequent editions, it is not easy to find a good impression. The persons who published this portrait were the friends of Shakspere. It was published at a time when his features would be well recollected by many of his contemporaries. The accuracy of the resemblance is also attested by the following lines from the pen of Ben Jonson :—

"This figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the graver had a strife
With Nature, to outdo the life:
O, could he but have drawn his wit
As well in brass, as he had hit
His face, the print would then surpass
All that was ever writ in brass.
But, since he cannot, Reader, look
Not on his Picture, but His Book."—B. J.

Under these circumstances we are inclined to regard it as the most genuine of the portraits of Shakspere. It wants that high art which seizes upon a likeness by general resemblance, and not through the merely accurate delineation of features. The draughtsman from whom this engraving was made, and the sculptor of the bust at Stratford, were literal copyists. It is perfectly clear that they were working upon the same original.

The portrait on the right of our title is the famous CHANDOS picture, formerly preserved at Stowe. It has a history belonging to it which says much for its authenticity. It formerly belonged to Davenant, and afterwards to Betterton. When in Betterton's possession it was engraved for Rowe's edition of Shakspere's works. It subsequently passed into various hands; during which transit it was engraved, first by Vertue and afterwards by Houbraken. It became the property of the Duke of Chandos, by marriage: and thence descended to the Buckingham family. Kneller copied this portrait for Dryden, and the poet addressed to the painter the following verses as a return for his gift :*—

"Shakspeare, thy gift, I place before my sight,
With awe I ask his blessing as I write;
With reverence look on his majestic face,
Proud to be less, but of his godlike race.
His soul inspires me, while thy praise I write,
And I like Teucer under Ajax fight:
Bids thee, through me, be bold; with dauntless breast
Contemn the bad, and emulate the best:
Like his, thy critics in the attempt are lost,
When most they rail, know then, they envy most."

At the sale of the Duke of Buckingham's effects it was purchased by the Earl of Ellesmere, and was presented by him to the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery.

The portrait on the left is held to have been painted by CORNELIUS JANSEN. An engraving from it was made by Earlom, and was prefixed to an edition of King Lear, published in 1770, edited by Mr. Jennens. It has subsequently been more carefully engraved by Mr. Turner, for Mr. Boaden's 'Inquiry into the Authenticity of the Portraits of Shakspere.' This portrait has the inscription, "Æt^e 46, 1610;" and in a scroll over the head are the words "Ut : Magus." Mr. Boaden says, "The two words are extracted from the famous Epistle of Horace to Augustus, the First of the Second Book; the particular passage this :—

* This picture, by permission of the late Duke of Buckingham, was copied for the engraving in the 'Gallery of Portraits,' for the first time for forty years; and the copy, by Mr. Witherington, R.A., is in our possession.

'Ille per *extentum funem* mihi posse videtur
Ire poeta; meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,
Ut Magus; et modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.

No man ever took this 'extended range' more securely than Shakspere; no man ever possessed so ample a control over the passions; and he transported his hearers, 'as a magician,' over lands and seas, from one kingdom to another, superior to all circumscription or confine." The picture passed from the possession of Mr. Jennens into that of the Duke of Somerset.

[Bust at Stratford.]

NOTE ON THE SHAKSPERE HOUSE AND NEW PLACE.

In accordance with a Note to Chap. III., page 33, we proceed to give an account of the present state of those properties at Stratford, connected with Shakspere, which have been purchased by public subscription. The writer of this 'Biography' has given, in his 'Passages of a Working Life,' some particulars relating to the purchase of the premises in Henley Street, of which the following is an abridgment:—

The house in which Shakspere is reputed to have been born was for sale. The old tenement at Stratford-upon-Avon, in which his father had lived, had been an object of curiosity and reverence during many years. Our countrymen went out of their way to look at it, even in the days before railroads. Foreigners, and Americans especially, talked about it and wrote about it. The freehold property had descended to a branch of Shakspere's family of the name of Hart. At the beginning of 1847 it was announced that it was to be sold to the highest bidder. It was determined, amongst a few friends, to call a public meeting at the Thatched House Tavern. There were no titled names paraded to draw together a company; yet there was a full attendance. A Committee was nominated, chiefly of men of letters. One nobleman only, Lord Morpeth, was included in the nomination. He was not a mere ornamental adjunct to a working Committee, but laboured as strenuously as any of us to accomplish the object for which we were associated. We raised a large subscription, though it was somewhat short of the three thousand pounds for which we obtained the property. The deficiency was subsequently made up, in some measure, by a performance at Covent Garden Theatre, in which all the great actors and actresses of the time took scenes from various plays of Shakspere; and partly by the proceeds of gratuitous Readings by Mr. Macready, at the time when he was leaving the stage.

When the Shakspere House had been purchased by the London Committee, and when the adjoining tenements had also been purchased by a separate subscription at Stratford, the necessity was apparent of having the house taken care of, and shown to visitors, by some one, who, at the least, would not cast an air of ridicule over the whole thing, as was the case with the ignorant women who had made a property of it by the receipt of shillings and sixpences. Mr. Charles Dickens organized a series of Amateur Performances, "in aid of the Fund for the endowment of a perpetual Curatorship of Shakspere's House, to be always held by some one distinguished in Literature, and more especially in Dramatic Literature; the profits of which it is the intention of the Shakspere House Committee to keep entirely separate from the fund now raising for the purchase of the House." In the July of that year the same performances, with a few variations of cast, were repeated at Edinburgh and at Glasgow. The receipts of the London and Provincial performances were considerable. There were many difficulties in the way of appointing a Curator of the Shakspere House. Lord Morpeth had pledged himself, in his official character, that if the house were vested in the Crown, it should be preserved with religious care, as the property of the British people, and should be maintained as the honoured residence of some dramatic author, who should be salaried by the Government. This project, defeated by the retirement of Lord Morpeth from office, would have been in many respects desirable; for we may venture to inquire if there is any efficient Trust for this property, and whether the Act of Mortmain does not interfere with any such Trust being created. It was conveyed in fee by the vendors, in 1847, to two gentlemen. Mr. Dickens and his friends wisely determined to do something useful with the proceeds of their labours, and they bought an annuity for one of the most able of our dramatic authors, Mr. Sheridan Knowles.

A bequest made by a gentleman of the same name as the poet has enabled the authorities at Stratford to put the premises in Henley Street in good repair; to remove all nuisances surrounding them; and to lay out the garden in a style that has pleasing associations, for its shrubs and flowers are of those mentioned by Shakspere. In this house a Library and Museum have been established. The admission here is upon a payment of sixpence.

In 1862, certain premises, which could be identified as part of the old property of New Place, were conveyed to Mr. Halliwell, upon his payment of £3,200. This sum was raised by public subscription.

In September, 1865, Mr. Ramsay visited Stratford, at the request of the writer of this 'Biography;' and has furnished him with the following memorandum of the condition of New Place:—

The ground has been excavated all over, and parts of the foundations of Shakspere's house, and of Clopton's, which succeeded it, have been laid bare. They are hollowed out from the surface, and covered with the coarse glass which is used for paving. These foundations are of rude, almost unhewn stone, the same kind as that of which the neighbouring Chapel has been built. A well has been cleaned out, and bricked down to the original stone groining, which had given way for about ten or twelve feet, and the water rises only to within about a foot of this groining. The adjoining house is called Nash's, and has been bought, though it was not Shakspere's property. The outside is all modernized, but inside is a fine old oak staircase, and other work, probably coeval with Shakspere's house, which adjoined it. The stones remain on which the timber uprights for the side of Shakspere's house rested, and the mark of the old gable is to be traced on Nash's house, which was the higher of the two. Nash's house had only a narrow slip of garden ground; and the foundation of the dividing wall still remains. At the bottom of Shakspere's Great Garden (as it was called) were lately some cottages and a barn. The latter, it was thought, might have been Shakspere's, from the appearance of the timber; these have been pulled down, but the timbers of the barn have been preserved by Mr Halliwell, and are stowed away in a cellar. An extremely ugly red-brick building—it is a theatre—is thrust in upon the grounds of New Place, the entrance being in Chapel Lane. Mr. Halliwell wishes it to be bought, and it is certainly desirable that it should be, for it is not only ugly in itself, but prevents the laying out of the grounds in anything like symmetry. The land at present is in a state of most admired disorder: money is wanted. Mr. Hunt (the worthy town-clerk of Stratford, who takes a great interest in all relating to Shakspere) thinks the proposed plan of making it *free* to the public will not answer, as there must be, in any case, watchers employed to prevent mischief."

Mr. Halliwell has published a splendid quarto volume, descriptive of New Place. The Rev. G. C. M. Bellew has written an agreeable book, entitled 'Shakespere's Home at New Place.' In 1863 was issued 'A Brief Guide to the Gardens of Shakespear, and a Prospectus of the Shakespear Fund,' a pamphlet of sixteen pages. The opening is rather high-flown for 'A Brief Guide':—

"Unless the visitor . . . can feel that he is treading on ground hallowed by the fact that here undoubtedly the Poet himself walked and meditated, and breathing the very air which was a breath to Shakespear, let him pass on to other scenes. It cannot be, however, but that interest will be raised, in the mind of every intelligent visitor, when told that these walls enclose the exact ground which formed the garden to the Poet's house.

"The evidences upon which this fact is established are too voluminous to be here introduced. Suffice it to say that they are incontrovertible, and that the exact boundaries, on all sides but one, that to the right on entering, have been ascertained *to an inch*."

The objects contemplated in the formation of "The Shakespeare Fund" are perhaps too grand to be realized in a country not much disposed to "Fetish worship."

"This fund was established in October, 1861, to accomplish the following objects:—1. The purchase of the Gardens of Shakespeare, at New Place. 2. The purchase of the remainder of the Birth Place Estate. 3. The purchase of Anne Hathaway's Cottage, with an endowment for a custodian. 4. The purchase of Getley's Copyhold, Stratford-on-Avon. 5. The purchase of any other properties at or near Stratford-on-Avon, that either formerly belonged to Shakespeare, or are intimately connected with the memories of his life. 6. The culendering and preservation of those records at Stratford-on-Avon, which illustrate the Poet's life, or the social life and history of Stratford-on-Avon in his time. And 7. The erection and endowment of a Shakespeare Library and Museum at Stratford-on-Avon."

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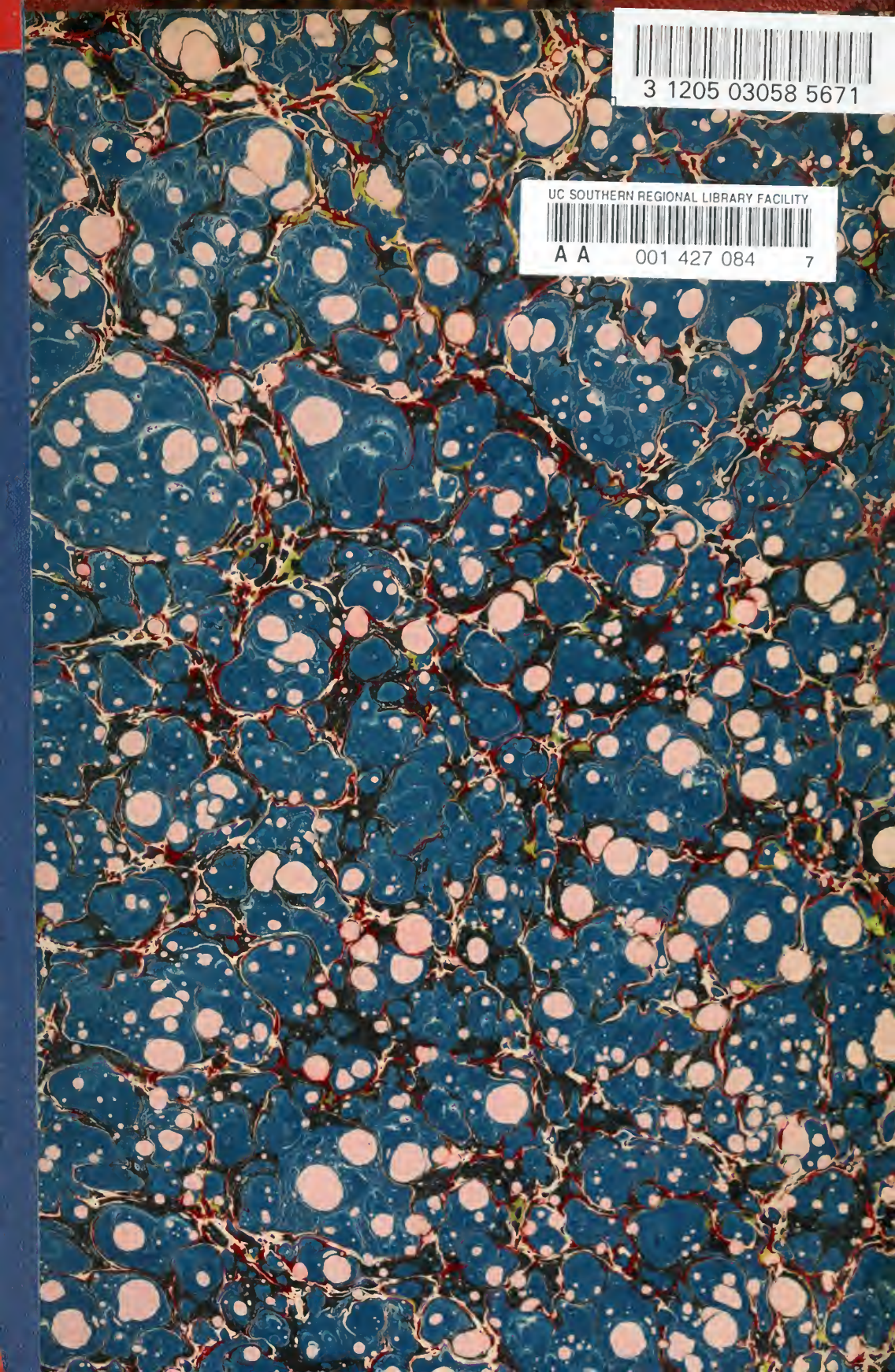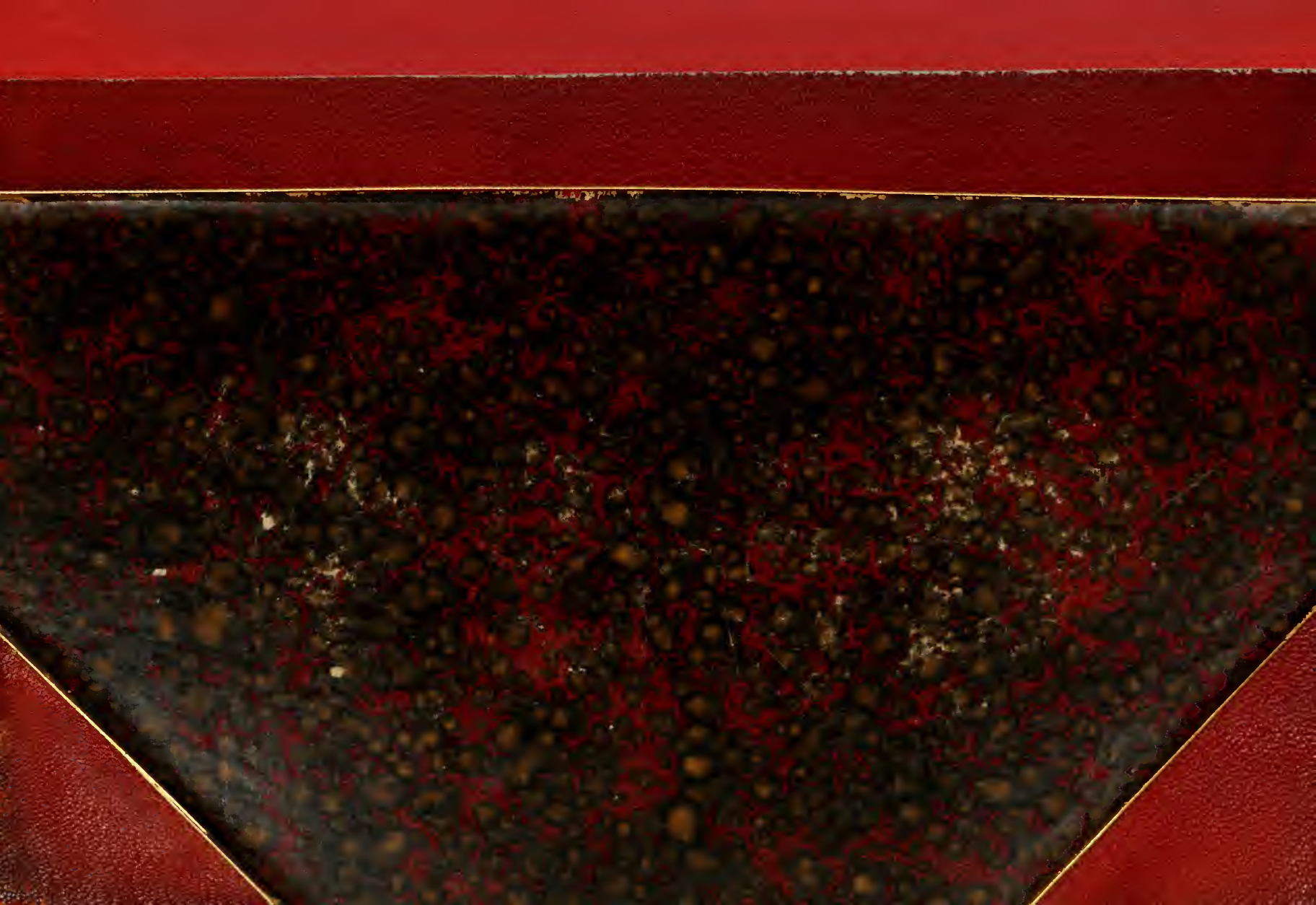
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